

20c

POPULAR DETECTIVE

SEPT. 1950

SEPT.
20c

POPULAR

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

DETECTIVE



NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER

A Steve Koski Novelet
By STEWART STERLING

A *Streetcar* NAMED DEATH

Complete Mystery
Novelet
By DONN MULLALLY

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THIRTY-TWO ADDITIONAL PAGES IN THIS ISSUE

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXIX, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SEPTEMBER, 1950

FEATURED MYSTERY NOVELET



A Streetcar Named Death

by *Donn Mullally*

Cable-car gripman Terrence Lannigan wondered why that blonde kept on riding—and found the weird answer in hot money, a frame-up and a death trap! 11

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Official Business



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

DAN FREEMAN came back to town on a freight. He was dirty, unshaven, and the expression in his eyes was that of a hunted animal. But he wasn't hunted any more, though for almost a year he had been. Now he was the hunter. Inside his shirt, close to his skin, was the cold steel of a gun. He had come back to town to kill.

Dan Freeman came to the house which had once been his. He went to the door, and a young woman answered. Her hair was still a soft cap of gold, and her figure was smooth and curved, exciting and dangerous. But her lips had thinned from the way he remembered them, and the glance she gave him was cold and suspicious.

"I'd like to talk to you a moment, Vera," Dan Freeman said evenly, and turned his head a bit so that the light caught him squarely in the face.

She went backward, stumbling a bit, one hand lifting in terror to her mouth. Blood drained from her face, leaving the makeup stark and brutal against the skin.

"Dear God," she whispered. "Dan!"

Back From the Grave

He came through the door, heeling it shut, and now the gun was in his hand, vicious and terrible, rock steady.

"But you're de—" Her eyes were fear-filled mirrors.

"Not dead," he said. "No, not dead, Vera."

A few days before the mangled body of a man struck by a hit-run driver had been identified by Vera as Dan Freeman. "Dan Freeman" had been buried.

Thus had ended the year-long police search for the man who allegedly killed his partner and fled. Now Vera was about to marry the man who had helped her frame Dan Freeman for that killing.

"Where—" she began, and Freeman cut her short.

"I've been everywhere," he said. "Running like a dog, living like a dog, eating like a dog. Vera, I've taken more than any man should take. And—" His voice slashed at her like a whip— "I've come back to settle with you for it."

She tried to run, but he caught her.

"Don't," she begged. "Don't kill me. I'll give back everything your will left me, Dan. I'll give you back everything that's yours. Yes, I'll even tell you who really killed your partner!"

"Talk," he said. "Talk before I beat it out of you."

The doorbell rang harshly, breaking into his words. It rang again, the sound vibrant.

Murder Must Wait

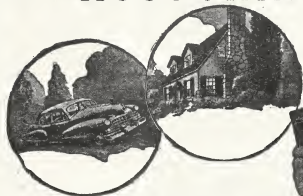
"Answer the door," Dan Freeman said. "Speak loudly and get rid of whoever is there. I'll be here, so don't try anything foolish."

She went to the door. Dan Freeman waited tensely. This house was a trap, he knew, a cruel dangerous trap, and he wanted to be finished and out of it. Once, trustingly, he had allowed himself to be framed for a murder. He would never be so off-guard again.

He heard the front door open. Then he heard some strange sounds—dull, mushy thuds. He heard something fall to

(Continued on page 8)

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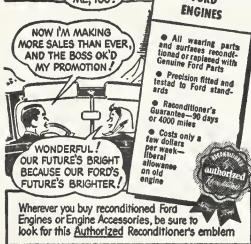
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says Curt Davis,
"SINCE I GAVE OUR
FAITHFUL FORD
A NEW FUTURE"



"SO I FIXED UP MY FORD TO
STEP UP MY SALES"



OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

the floor. Shivers raced up his spine. Alarmed, he rushed across the living room into the hall. His foot caught on something. He didn't know then that it was a body.

He was thrown forward. Instinct tightened the muscles of his hand, and his gun roared like a cannon, glass splintering from the tiny door window. As he lifted to regain his feet, he heard someone step in behind him. Then hell exploded in his head, as he was slugged.

When he came to, he saw Vera lying there—where he had stumbled over her. She was dead. The mushy sounds he'd heard had been the killer's blows crushing the top of her golden head, and now the gaudy crimson of her blood was thickening and clotting on her face.

Death of an Alibi

Vera wouldn't talk now. He had intended to kill her, but someone else had done it. She could never clear him now.

Somewhere in the night a siren already was beginning its banshee wail. The chase was started. Once again he would be the quarry. Once again, he would be hunted—for a murder he had not committed!

That is the exciting start of **IN AT THE KILL**, by Wilbur S. Peacock, featured novelet in the next issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**.

There's excellent suspense in this absorbing story of a man and his double-crossing wife. Vera had promised to send Dan Freeman money when he had fled after that first murder—instead she had sent the police. Now, even in death, she was bringing the Law down upon him once again.

For thrills, action, and surprises all the way—**IN AT THE KILL** is tops!

Other Great Stories

Also in our next issue, another outstanding novelet—**THE TIME WILL COME**, by Frances Beck. Kimbal Wyatt, a GI law student, took a job as a

(Continued on page 128)



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

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THE TRAIL LED TO BEDROOM "B"

THEY FELL FOR IT!
THE "TOP SECRET"
ENVELOPE IS GONE

NOW WE'LL HAVE
A DECOY TO LEAD US
TO THEIR HIDEOUT!



AS THE "CAPITOL COMET" STREAKS
THROUGH THE NIGHT, TWO GOVERNMENT
AGENTS SEEM PLEASED TO FIND THEIR
BRIEF CASE HAS BEEN LOOTED...

HERE'S OUR MAN!
WHAT SPACE,
GEORGE?

THAT PAIR'S FROM
BEDROOM "B", SIR.
BLOND GENTLEMAN



USING A GEIGER COUNTER, OUR AGENTS
PICK UP TRACES OF A MILDLY RADIO-
ACTIVE DUST THEY HAD SPRINKLED
ON THEIR BEDROOM FLOOR

I'LL TRAIL HIM, JOE
YOU WAIT AT THE
BUREAU FOR MY
CALL



RIGHT. THIS
LOOKS LIKE
THE PAY-OFF



THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

WHO ARE
YOU?

WE'RE GOVERNMENT
AGENTS. YOU'RE
UNDER ARREST!



THE CHIEF WANTS
YOU THERE WHEN HE
GIVES THE STORY TO
THE PAPERS, CHES



THEN I'D BETTER
SHAVE RIGHT NOW.
I DIDN'T HAVE TIME
THIS MORNING



THIN
GILLETTES,
EH? THANKS



WHAT A SWEET,
SLICK SHAVE! NO
WONDER I'VE BEEN
HEARING ABOUT
THESE BLADES

THIN
GILLETTES
ARE PLENTY
KEEN



BUT HOW DID YOU
KNOW JUST WHO
TOOK THE
'ENVELOPE'?

THAT'S AN
OFFICIAL
SECRET



A FINE-
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TYPE FOR THAT
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NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

A Streetcar *Named* **DEATH**

CHAPTER I

GIRL IN FRONT

TERRENCE LANNIGAN had that haunted feeling. It was this blonde sitting in the open, front end of his cable car. He had noticed her first about seven-thirty P.M. She might've been there before, but lost in the dinner-hour mob. Now it was going on eleven and she was still with him. She was as far forward as she could

A NOVELET BY
DONN MULLALLY



Lannigan's fist rocked
against the inspector's jaw

Cable-car gripman Terrence Lannigan wondered why that blonde kept on riding—and found the answer in hot money, a frame-up and a guntrap!

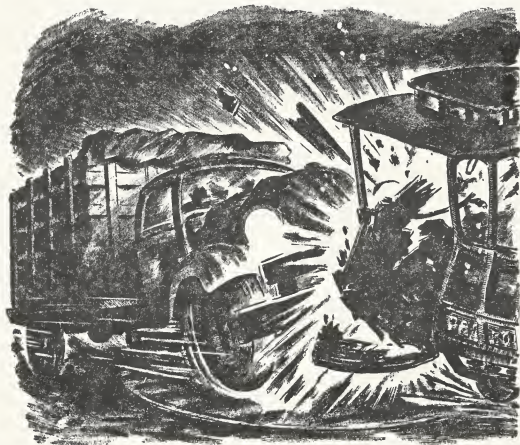
The Mysterious Trolley Passenger Wouldn't

get, huddled against the front window and animated as a dress mannikin except when the wind found her. Then she'd shake like one of those little, pop-eyed Mexican dogs.

She wore a light, green short coat

Italian waiters, shopgirls, clerks, insurance salesmen, and a few thousand tourists who "just had to ride that quaint little green car to Fishermen's Wharf."

Sometimes he'd known a tourist to go



over her suit and the temperature was in the high fifties, the wind sharp and laced with San Francisco fog.

Lannigan had on his old Navy pea-coat and leather gloves, but it made him cold to look at her. He'd been a gripman on the Powell Street cable car line for five years. He thought he'd hauled everything in the way of characters—millionaires to their penthouses on Nob Hill, Chinese gamblers and laundrymen,

for a couple of round trips hand running. Which was okay. The old fugitive from the Gay Nineties made a pretty fair rubber-neck bus. You sat in the open air, facing the scenery as it went by.

You could see the shop windows and hotels downtown, the Bay Bridge and lights below from the crest of Nob Hill, a corner of Chinatown and Little Italy. The benches were slick, and on steep

Get Off Till the Very Last Stop – MURDER!

grades a tourist did more than rub shoulders with the natives. If you happened to sit next to a well-made babe, it was real chummy.

But three hours! Nobody could be that crazy about San Francisco.

this lovin' car any lighter." panted Lannigan.

HE STOPPED heaving and went to the front platform. Sonny gave him two bells; Lannigan engaged the cable



The cable car hit Sonny Barolini

Sonny Barolini, the conductor, made a crack to Lannigan when the car was on the Market Street turntable. They were bending their backs like a couple of coolies to roll it up to the cable slot.

"Who's your blonde friend, Terry?"

"I don't know, but she doesn't make

in its underground slot. Their little green-and-white job lunged forward at a mad nine miles an hour. Lannigan jived the bell on the car roof.

From Geary Street they caught the first wave of the show-break crowd and

Lannigan was too busy to think about *his* spook. But the last couple of blocks at the other end of the line were mostly vacant lots and warehouses. He had nothing else to look at. Her even, fragile features. She wasn't any warmer. Lannigan expected to see her turn blue any minute.

As he and Sonny were taking their break, he said, "I'm going to find out what that dame's all about. She's driving me dotty."

"Hasn't she given you a tumble, yet?" chuckled Sonny.

"No," Lannigan said. "She doesn't do anything—just sits there!"

Lannigan strode to the platform. The girl didn't look around when his hundred and ninety pounds rocked the car. He scowled at his watch. Three minutes before he was due out. He lit a cigarette.

"Pardon me, Miss," said Lannigan quietly.

The girl started, said: "Oh!"

"I thought you might be more comfortable riding inside."

"Thank you, I'm fine."

"It's pretty cold out here," Lannigan insisted.

"I'm all right," she said.

Lannigan considered himself dismissed. He opened the sliding door to the closed end of the car; shut it again after he'd stepped inside. Sonny Barolini was sitting at the far end of the car. He dragged on his cigarette and came up with a big, Genoese grin.

"So what gives, skipper?" Barolini asked.

"She's not talking." Lannigan slumped beside the conductor.

"I think you ought to turn her in to the first cop you see."

"What for?"

"I saw a guy perch on a window ledge ten stories up, one time, like she's doing now. The cops tried to coax him down. The fire department started spreading a net under him. All at once, boom! he jumps."

"What's that got to do with her?"

Lannigan wanted to know. "She jumps off the car while it's moving, she ruins her nylons."

"Don't be a dumb jerk, Lannigan. She can throw herself in front of a passing truck—like that!" Barolini snapped his fingers.

Lannigan studied the set of the girl's head through the smear of fingerprints on the glass door; imagined he could see her shiver out there on the front platform. "Why would a kid like her do that?" he began.

"I don't know why—a love affair gone sour, no job, no money for the rent, maybe the old man's ditching her. How do I know, why?" Barolini waved his arms. "But it happens every day. Boom!"

Lannigan got to his feet slowly, squaring his shoulders. "Maybe you're right," he drawled. "But I can't turn her over to the cops till she does something screwier than ride this bucket all night."

"What's screwier?" jeered Barolini.

At one o'clock their little green relic swayed to a stop in front of the car-barn, the girl still with them. Lannigan said: "I'm sorry, Miss; this is definitely as far as we go."

She looked at him, sighed. Without even, "Drop dead," she stepped to the pavement and moved stiffly down the street. Lannigan watched her, heard the door behind him slide open. Barolini came out on the platform beside him.

"Lose your girl, skipper?"

"Yeah."

"Well, don't take it so hard," leered Barolini. "She'll probably be back tomorrow night."

"I can wait," Lannigan nodded.

"If she does," chuckled Sonny, "ask her if she's got a friend who'd like to ride with me."

"All right, funny man," said Lannigan. "Let's see you push your half of this buggy into the shed."

BAROLINI had to check out his money in the office, so Lannigan went ahead to the coffee shop across the street. "I'll

warm the waitress up for you," he told Sonny.

"Just tell her Sonny'll be there—she'll warm up," Barolini laughed.

As Lannigan stepped into the dark street, he wasn't thinking about warm waitresses—or even hot coffee. That half-frozen, troubled kid; he wondered about her. Where she'd gone, if she had a place to go. Lannigan cupped a match in his big hands, hunched the end of his cigarette into the flame. There was a short half-block walk to the all-night coffee shop where he was meeting Sonny.

Maybe *she'd* be walking the rest of the night. What could make a dame act that way?

Then he saw her. Apparently she'd turned the block while he had been putting his car to bed. She appeared suddenly at the corner. Something in the way she tensed, hugging that thin coat to her throat, telegraphed what was coming.

He could hear a motor howling in second gear. When he was no more than ten feet behind the girl, there was a clash of gears and a panel truck flashed down the hill into his line of vision, careened through the intersection.

Lannigan dived, caught the girl around the waist just as she left the curb. She screamed and struggled to get away.

"Take it easy, honey," Lannigan said. "The truck's past now. You're all right."

She gasped, went limp. For a second Lannigan thought she had fainted, then she started to fight again—but feebly. The truck was a block away, its tail light dodging and lurching over the rough pavement.

Lannigan released the girl and she turned slowly, looked up at him. He said: "You don't have to thank me."

She shook her head. "I wasn't about to."

Gripping her green patent leather bag primly, she started across the street. Lannigan's long legs closed the gap between them. "Just a minute," he

drawled. "I said you didn't have to thank me, but at least you can let me buy you a cup of coffee."

He had her arm, guiding her toward the lighted doorway of the Acme Doughnut Shop.

She said: "You're hurting my arm."

Lannigan snorted. "Yeah? That's good. I oughta hurt something else!"

He reached in front of her and pushed the door open. He didn't let go until she was trapped in one of Acme's baby-blue booths. He told the waitress to bring them coffee, waited until it was there before he opened up on the kid.

She'd taken off her white cloth gloves, was warming her hands on the hot cup. Lannigan noticed she wore a diamond solitaire and a wedding band.

"You're lucky you can do that," he said.

"W-what?" she stammered.

"Warm your hands. If you'd had your way a few minutes ago, they'd been cold from now on."

She shuddered, sipped her coffee. "May I have the sugar?" she asked.

"Sure." He pushed it toward her on the slick bakelite table top. "I suppose you'll tell me you didn't see the truck? Maybe I'll buy that, and you can go down to the next corner and try again."

She put one spoonful of sugar in her coffee, stirred thoughtfully. Lannigan saw Barolini enter the shop. Sonny did a small take when he recognized who was in the booth with Lannigan, but stayed away.

"Start lying," Lannigan told the girl.

"Why should I lie to you?" she asked.

"Because if you tell the truth, I'll yell for a cop."

"You wouldn't!"

"What else can I do?"

"May I ask how this concerns you?"

LANNIGAN lifted his mug of coffee, crooked a pinkie extravagantly. "You may, and I'll tell you. We're both the same breed of animal. I'm no philosopher, but I know if I read in the *Chronicle* tomorrow where you've knocked your-

self off, I'll feel it was partly my fault. I'm an ugly Harp with red hair growing out of my ears, but I'm all I've got to live with. I don't want nothing like that to come between me and Lannigan."

"Lannigan? Your name is Lannigan?"

"Right." He nodded. "You might as well tell me your name. The real one."

"Mrs. Peter Blandy," she murmured.

"Okay Mrs. Blandy," Lannigan grinned, "or can I call you Pete?"

She almost smiled. "No. But you may call me Betty, if you wish."

"Fine." Lannigan leaned his elbows on the table. "Now look, Betty. Let's understand each other. I'm as allergic to cops as the next guy. I don't want to turn you in if I can help myself, which means if I can help you. Suppose you level with me, huh? Maybe if I know what's messing up your life, we can work out something better'n suicide."

She stared into her cup for a minute, then looked at him. "Peter Blandy—the name doesn't mean anything to you?" she asked.

Lannigan shook his head.

Betty sighed. "Peter Blandy was released from San Quentin today."

Lannigan sat up straight. "Oh. What was he in for?"

"Embezzlement. But that's unimportant," she went on. "When he was sentenced, I sold our home in Los Angeles, came here and took a job, to be near him. I love my husband, Mr. Lannigan. I don't care what anyone thinks, what he's done."

"That's the proper spirit," Lannigan nodded. "But you say he's out today. Why aren't you with him?"

Her eyes began to fill. She tried to speak, choked. "Don't you think I want to be?" she asked. "I've waited five years!"

"So?"

Betty finished her coffee before she answered. "The last time I saw him, I went over to San Quentin on his visiting day. I knew something was wrong the minute he came into the room. At first

he wouldn't speak to me at all. Then he began to accuse me of running around with other men. He knew all about it, he said."

"Is there another guy?" Lannigan asked.

"Of course not. But I couldn't make him believe that. I tried, but all he said was, 'Betty, don't try to cover your boy friend. I get out next week and I'm going to take care of you both.'"

"And today he's out, so you're afraid to go home," Lannigan summed up for her.

Betty nodded, her eyes fixed on the empty bottom of her coffee cup. Lannigan waved the waitress to their table and ordered a refill. He offered Betty a cigarette, had one himself while their coffee was cooling.

"Look," he said, finally, "I realize I don't stack up as an expert on domestic trouble, but during the war I saw plenty of this sort of thing. The married guys were always taking a ribbing from their shipmates. Momma was supposed to be going out with some Four-F joker. I've known guys to blow their cork worrying about it—just like your husband."

Lannigan allowed what he'd said to soak in before he continued: "So here's your old man about to be released from Quentin. Naturally his buddies envy him and make it rough. They tell him stories about other men who got out and found their wife shacked up."

"Then how can I convince him, Mr. Lannigan?"

"The name is Terrence, Betty." Lannigan smiled with a shake of his head. "How, is up to you. I don't think you can go wrong; acting like you're glad he's a free man."

She snubbed her cigarette, smiled. "You've made me feel a lot better," she said.

"It was the coffee," Lannigan said. "You're not afraid now?"

Betty started to shake her head, stopped. "Well, maybe, a little. If he won't listen to me—"

"He'll listen," Lannigan said. "But

If it'd make you feel any braver, I'll take you home—sort of stand by under the window in case you need someone to hold Pete down."

"Would you? I mean, I know I'm taking a terrible advantage of you, Terrence."

"Forget it." He grinned, sliding out of the booth. "Just an old Municipal Railway service."

CHAPTER II

CORPSE TO EXPLAIN



ANNIGAN drove Betty to Russian Hill. They cruised slowly along Jones Street until she pointed to an apartment house in a block of buildings that grew out of the nearly vertical slope

like bananas on a stem. Bananas with bay windows.

"I'm second floor, front," she said.

Lannigan nodded. "Good."

He drove to the next corner, pulled into the side street and parked. Betty said: "There were no lights in the windows. Maybe he's gone."

"That could be," Lannigan agreed. "And he might have got tired waiting for you and turned in. Anyway, here's how we'll work it, Betty. . ."

He gave her a book of paper matches. "When you let yourself in, slip one end of this over the bolt in the front door so it won't lock. Then go up and try to make peace with Pete. If it's too rugged, get to the front windows—wave or scream or do something. I'll be right there and help you tame your boy."

She took his hand. "Terrence, I can't ever make this sound as sincere as I mean it to—but you have been wonderful."

"I told you to forget it, didn't I?" He grinned at her. "And Betty," he added as she was opening the car door.

"Yes."

"If I don't see you again, come take a ride on the cable sometime and tell me

how you and Pete made out. Will you do that?"

"You know I will, Terrence."

"Good luck, kid."

He watched her until she was out of sight. He gave her about two minutes to climb the hill, then crawled from under the wheel and walked to the corner. The street was quiet—deserted, he thought, as he started to tackle the grade. It was a tough haul. Lannigan was blowing, his muscles bunched and hot before he reached a point opposite Betty's apartment.

HE WAS standing in the shadow of a telephone pole when he saw another man about twenty feet further up the hill. The man had stopped to light a pipe. In the glow of the match, Lannigan could make out his sharp features and mottled skin—pock marks.

Lannigan knew he had to move. So he pushed himself on up the hill, past the man, who apparently got his pipe going and went about his business. When he had Jones Street to himself again, Lannigan drifted back to his place across from Betty's windows.

The lights hadn't been turned on in her apartment. Lannigan huddled in the warmth of his pea-coat, smiled to himself. He'd wait another five minutes, then consider the Blandys reconciled. If they didn't need a light to argue by, it couldn't be much of a pitched battle.

He had started across the street to take his book of matches out of the lock, when a window opened and he heard Betty cry: Help! Terry, please hurry!"

She sounded dazed, hysterical. He was up the four steps to the door of the building in one bound. Inside, there was a small, mirror-walled lobby. Lannigan saw himself in triplicate converging on the stairway. He loped up the steps, met Betty at the door of her apartment.

She couldn't have been more different from the girl who had left his car ten minutes ago! She was still wearing her green coat, but one sleeve was smeared

with blood. Her hair was mussed, half over her face, and there was more claret on one cheek. Lannigan gasped: "Good Lord, Betty, what's he done to you?"

Her mouth twitched. "He— Oh, come in, Terry."

She stumbled backward into the room. Lannigan followed and shut the door. The lights were on now, and he saw a man's body sprawled behind the coffee table. He knew immediately it was a body. It was too flat against the floor to be alive.

The room was decorated with pickled maple, chintz, hand-painted china—and gore. There was a black-handled kitchen knife lying on the coffee table, its blade covered with blood. The handle was smeared with it. There was blood on the curtains and window where Betty had gone to call him. There was blood on the door and on the light switch.

Lannigan looked at Betty; there was no blood in her face, her lips. She was chalky white, her hair a mat of dry yellow strings. He said: "How did this happen, Betty?"

"I—I don't know."

"You've got to know," he insisted.

"I d-don't remember, Terry," she sobbed.

Lannigan crossed the room and eyed the corpse; a complete job. The knife blade had been driven into the man's body five or six times, from the throat to his belt buckle.

Lannigan swallowed rapidly, had to turn away to keep his stomach in line. His face felt cold, wet. "This—this is your husband?" he asked Betty.

She nodded, sinking weakly into a large, wing-back chair.

"I know you didn't just walk in here and slit his throat," Lannigan stated.

"I didn't!" she cried. "I didn't kill him! I swear, I didn't!"

He pulled an ottoman close to her chair and sat on it. "Honey, you've been through hell but we've got to get this straight. Try to remember everything from the time you left my car."

"All right, Terry," she sighed, press-

ing her fingers to her forehead. "I walked up the hill, let myself in and fixed the lock as you'd told me. I came upstairs and unlocked the apartment door. I remember the room was dark except for the light from the street lamp outside. I could see Peter sitting on the davenport just the outline of his head. I think I said something about being sorry I was so late."

She stopped and looked at Lannigan, her eyes dazed, empty. "Yes," he prompted, "then what? What'd he say?"

"I don't remember anything."

"Did he stand up, or just sit there?"

"I—he stood up. I don't know."

He took her head in his big hands, shook her gently. "Think, Betty, think. You have to remember!"

She screamed and tried to pull away from him. Lannigan held on, saying: "Wait a minute, Betty. Wait."

LANNIGAN'S fingers explored under that tousled mop of blonde hair. There was a swelling above her left ear. When he touched it she cried out and tried to squirm away from him again. This time he let her go.

"I think we've got something now," he said, standing up. "Look, you remember coming into the room, your husband outlined against the window. Then you blacked out, right?"

She nodded and he went on. "Don't you remember anything else? Pain, for instance?"

Her eyes widened. "Yes, Terry, I do now. Pain, and—and a sudden burst of light! The next thing I knew, I was lying on top of Peter. I had a knife in my hand. He was so still."

"That's better," he said. "Where's your telephone?"

"T-telephone," she stammered. "Why?"

"We've got to call the police."

"Police. Oh, no, Terry!"

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm not one of those guys you read about who helps a lady ditch her husband's body, even when I'm sure she's been framed. Now,

where's the phone?"

When Inspector Al Artell, Homicide Squad, San Francisco Police, arrived, he looked more like a bond salesman than a cop. His blue flannel suit had exactly the right amount of drape and padding in the shoulders; the correct number of patch pockets—four. His shirt was obviously tailor-made. His red polka-dot bow tie had been knotted by hand.

He worked quietly. The only fireworks in the apartment after the arrival of the police were the flash bulbs of the photographer. Artell looked at the body, the murder weapon, made a tour of the apartment. When he came back to the living room he smiled at Betty and asked if she'd mind stepping into the kitchen—he had a few questions.

Lannigan stood around with his hands in his pockets, watching a bunch of fellow municipal employees earn their bucks. There was a lot of dusting for fingerprints, more pictures, and much general rummaging through drawers and bookcases. When the photographer was through, the ambulance crew took the body away on a stretcher. Lannigan was an orphan.

The kitchen door opened and Betty came out. She didn't look any worse than she had when she went in. She had been crying, but it was time she broke down. Lannigan heard Artell suggest she freshen up, put on some other clothes.

"I'm sure you'll feel better, Mrs. Blandy," the inspector said.

"All right, Lannigan," said Artell,

"I'd like to talk to you, now."

Terrence followed the inspector into the kitchen, accepted a proffered cigarette and light.

"I gather from Mrs. Blandy, you hardly figure in this at all," Artell said, and smiled.

"Yeah," Lannigan nodded. "I just barely made it."

He went on to tell the inspector how he had first noticed Mrs. Blandy when she started her career of riding his cable car, and how later he'd happened along in time to pull her out of the path of the panel truck.

"I gave her a mild talking to," Lannigan said, "and got her to tell me about her husband being released from Quentin today. She told me she was afraid to go home because he had a screwy idea she'd been double-crossing him while he was in stir. I told her she ought to try to talk him out of it. I offered to come along for moral support. I'd wait outside, within calling distance. That's about it, until she did call me."

"You'd never seen Mrs. Blandy before tonight?"

"Never to know it was her."

Artell was leaning against the kitchen sink, turned and flicked his ashes into the drain. He said: "Frankly, Lannigan, what's your hunch on this?"

Lannigan shrugged. "Before I phoned you people, I made Mrs. Blandy remember what she could. She was pretty shaken, so it wasn't much. She'd been bumped on the head, and seemed to

[Turn page]

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draw a blank from the time she stepped into the apartment to when she came to—lying on top of her husband, with a knife in her hand. I suppose somebody might have been hiding behind the door and slugged her, then killed Blandy and put the knife in her hand."

"You were in front of the building. Did you see anyone leave?"

Lannigan shook his head. "No. But the killer could've been hiding in the upstairs hall and left after I came in."

Artell smiled. "That's possible. However, if he did, it'd mean he knew you were outside. As I get the picture, you didn't walk up the hill with Mrs. Blandy—you weren't across the street until several minutes after she was here."

"That's right," admitted Lannigan.

ARTELL stepped to the kitchen cabinet, opened a drawer. He nodded to Lannigan. "The weapon came from this set."

There was a plastic sheath in the drawer, holding a bread knife and a couple of paring knives that were mates to the one in the living room. There was an empty slot where the butcher knife should have been.

"I'm afraid the girl's in trouble with her story, Lannigan," Artell said. "This murderer she wants to sell me is too sharp. He knows Blandy is checking out of Quentin today. That's easy, but how can the killer be sure Blandy will come here and be alone in the apartment? Where does he get his information about the rhubarb between Blandy and his wife? And for a finish, how could he anticipate that Mrs. Blandy would bring a big Irish gripman home with her? Does he sound for-real to you?"

Lannigan brought his thick eyebrows together in a scowl. "What about the lump on her head? It's real."

"I know. And she might've gotten it struggling with her husband."

"You believe she walked in here and cold-bloodedly knifed him?"

"No, I'll give her a break," said Artell evenly. "I think after she left your car

and started up the hill by herself, the fear of her husband returned. She came in the apartment, found him asleep on the davenport. She's terrified by now. She wants something to protect herself, so she gets the knife. When she wakes him, he starts lacing into her, probably throws her down—the knife comes out and there you have it."

Lannigan studied the detective's face. "You call that a break?" he asked.

"Definitely. At worst it's manslaughter. And with a good trial lawyer, it's probably self-defense. It would be just as easy for me to believe her performance on your cable car and the attempted suicide were staged so she'd have a disinterested party for an alibi."

"What kind of an alibi would I be?" snorted Lannigan.

"Not so hot," Artell agreed with a smile. "But the average person planning a murder isn't as clever as the people on the radio. If they plan at all, it's generally amateur night."

"I'm sorry, inspector."

"She's too nice a girl," Artell said, shaking his head. "They frequently are. Well, I guess that's all for you, Lannigan. If there's anything else, you'll hear from me."

"Okay, Inspector," Lannigan said lamely. "I don't want to wish you any bad luck, but . . ."

"You hope the Chief sends me back to pounding a beat," the detective finished it for him good-naturedly.

"Yeah."

CHAPTER III

MISSING HALF MILLION



IT WASN'T a usual thing for Lannigan to lie awake after he hit the sack. Eight hours in the open air swinging a five-foot grip lever and putting muscle on the wood-block brakes that stop a cable car by dragging on the rails, were a firm guarantee against sleepless nights.

Of course, here he'd had a little murder mixed with the exercise and fresh air.

Anyway he was nervous as a banker. The whole deal with Betty Blandy played a return engagement against the dark ceiling of his room. He couldn't close his eyes.

When he got to Al Artell, Lannigan's memory went on a broken-record binge. Everything Artell had said played back about four times. Especially. . .

"And for a finish, how could he anticipate that Mrs. Blandy would bring a big, Irish gripman home with her?"

Lannigan sat up in a tangle of bedclothes, pawed through his shirt for cigarette and matches. If that was all Artell was worrying about, maybe there was an answer. The man Lannigan had seen outside Betty's place, the man lighting a pipe. Lannigan remembered his pockmarked face, sharp features. Sure, it was a public street. Anybody had a right to take a walk, even after *two* a.m. And there was no law against smoking a pipe—except it could've been a signal.

Lannigan put on his robe and paced the floor of his two-room apartment. Somebody was out to kill Pete Blandy and set his wife up for the patsy. They get word to Blandy in prison that his wife is playing him dirty on the outside; Blandy blows his top. The scene is set for a family row on his first night as a free man. Somehow they manage to be in the apartment with him. Outside, they have a guy who's supposed to let them know when Betty comes home, so they can put the rest of the plan in gear; sap Betty, knife her old man.

However, Betty's afraid to come home. When she does finally creep in, here's Lannigan puffing up the hill a couple minutes behind her. The lookout spots him and flashes a warning.

It almost had to happen that way—unless it happened Artell's way. Lannigan wondered if he could sell the inspector this switch. He was positive there would be no sleep for Lannigan until he at least tried.

He found Artell in a beat-up little office at the Hall of Justice. Artell was tired. He was in his tailor-made shirt sleeves, his tie hanging in a couple of limp strands on either side of his open collar.

"Well, Lannigan," he sighed, "what is it?"

"I had a thought after I got home."

The detective smiled wearily, shaking his head. "There's always something, just when I'm ready to go off duty. Okay, let's have it."

Lannigan told him about the man with the pipe and the pockmarked face, how he thought this character connected with what was going on at the time in the Blandy apartment. "I know it might be nothing, too," added Lannigan, "but there's a chance."

"Think you could identify this party?" asked Artell.

Lannigan nodded. "I don't know why, but his face stuck in my mind."

"All right, suppose we give the picture files a play?" Artell rose from the desk and slipped into his suit coat. He smiled crookedly at Lannigan. "I should have gone home ten minutes ago."

They went downstairs and spent the next hour and a half looking at pockmarked mugs. It only took about fifteen minutes for Lannigan to find a man he thought resembled his friend with the pipe. But Artell insisted they look further and before he was through, Lannigan had winnowed out a half dozen prospects.

Not that the men looked alike, exactly. But after spreading their pictures on a table, Lannigan had to admit he couldn't make a pick. "I'm sorry, inspector."

Artell shrugged. "Think nothing of it, Lannigan. Sight identification is always tricky. Let five people see the same man, put him in a line-up and they'll all pick somebody else and swear he's the one they saw."

"My lead's no good, then," said Lannigan, feeling like a prize dope.

"I didn't say that," answered Artell

cheerfully. "We'll bring these six men in, question them, see what they've got to say for themselves about last night."

ARTELL signed for the pictures. Lannigan tagged along to the inspector's office. "Maybe if I see those men in person?" he suggested.

"Don't worry," he was assured by Artell, "you'll have a chance. Now is there anything else? Or can I go home to my wife?"

"Well," Lannigan began, "as a matter of fact, there—"

"Oh, no!"

"It'll only take a second of your time," Lannigan promised him. "But what about this Blandy? His wife told me he was in Quentin for embezzlement. She didn't say who he embezzled from or for how much. I wonder if that might be important?"

Artell had slumped behind his desk again, shaking his head. "Only a second, the man says."

He fired a cigarette. "Okay, my friend, I'll ease your mind. Here's what we know on Blandy. He was head cashier at a branch bank down in Inglewood—a bright young man, according to the record. The bank had him tagged for big things. They had no idea how big. The examiners surprised him one day, uncovered a very sweet racket. Blandy had been discounting invoices for a manufacturer of Hollywood-type brassieres. There was nothing wrong with this paper, except it wasn't receipted. In other words, Blandy and the chief accountant of this brassiere manufacturer had put their pointed little heads together, and Blandy was accepting invoices on accounts that didn't exist and paying off in good, hard cash—half a million bucks' worth.

"What happens? Blandy and the accountant for the uplift society draw one-to-five years. Answer your question?"

"How about his partner?" asked Lannigan. "And the half million? Was that ever returned to the bank?"

"The partner was a man named White. The word I get from Quentin is, he died a year ago—flu. The five hundred grand? The bank's surety company is still crying."

Lannigan was on his feet. "I'm not trying to tell you your job, inspector, but isn't that a fair motive for knocking Blandy off?"

The detective shrugged, crushed his cigarette. "Everybody tells a cop his job, Lannigan; why be an exception? You're right about the five hundred G's being a motive—for anybody, including his ever-lovin' little woman."

Lannigan brooded over what the detective had said, without finding a ready answer. He saw Artell push back from his desk.

"If it's all right with you, pal," the inspector said, "I'm going home. Why don't you do the same thing?"

It was broad, more-or-less, daylight when Lannigan drove up in front of his apartment. The sky was gray with fog. A perfect morning to sleep in; not that Lannigan expected to be able to close his eyes. However, after scrambling himself a couple of eggs, he stretched out on the folding bed just to see how it felt.

Which was all he knew until someone started to lean on his doorbell. He sat bolt upright, squinting at his wrist-watch. *Two-thirty*. He felt stiff, logy, mildly hung-over. Lannigan shook his head, stumbled to the hall of his apartment and pressed the button that worked the electric lock on the front entrance.

He opened his door a couple of inches and peered through the crack. If this turned out to be some joker selling brushes, there would be one joker with a fat lip.

The man climbing the stairs already had the fat lip, but it seemed to be natural, like his no-hair. He was a squat, little character who carried himself as though he still expected to grow some more. A man and a woman were with him, but Lannigan couldn't tell

much about them as the little man was thrusting a card at him and talking at the same time.

"You're Terrence Lannigan?"

"Like it says on my mailbox downstairs."

Lannigan held the man's business card up to the light. It read:

T. V. MARKSON

Attorney at Law

"I represent Mrs. Peter Blandy," declared Markson. "I'd appreciate your giving us a few minutes of your time, sir."

"Yeah," Lannigan scraped a palm across the bristles on his chin. "I'll be right with you."

HE CLOSED the door, went to the living room of his apartment and tossed the bed back in the wall, picked up his slippers and robe. Lannigan stopped in the bathroom on his way to the door, combed his hair. Little Mr. Markson, and whoever was with him out in the hall, would have to take him with red whiskers and like it.

Lannigan opened the door, and Markson pompously led a short parade down the hall to the living room. Terrence fell in at the end of the line behind a broad-shouldered young guy wearing a Donegal tweed sport jacket, slacks and loafer moccasins.

In the living room, they stood in a circle and Markson introduced his friends. "Mr. and Mrs. James Hastings, Mr. Lannigan," he said.

For the first time, Lannigan saw Mrs. Hastings in a good light. Markson didn't have to tell him she was Betty Blandy's sister, but he did. They weren't identical twins; still the bone structure was the same, their general build—except somehow, Mrs. Hastings looked more ripe. Maybe it was the smear of lipstick and the plunging neckline. Lannigan stopped plunging with it as he heard Markson talking.

"The Hastings flew in from Los Angeles this morning when this—ah—un-

fortunate news broke," Markson was saying. "They retained me in their sister's behalf."

Lannigan said: "That's swell. Won't you sit down?"

They did. Markson peeled the cellophane off a cigar, nicked its end with a thumbnail and stuck it in his face. All without dropping a syllable. "We've come from City Jail," he said. "We had a very interesting talk with Mrs. Blandy. She told us about you, of course. We thought you might—"

Mrs. Hastings stirred impatiently. "Pardon me, Mr. Markson," she interrupted him, "I'm sure Mr. Lannigan knows why we're here."

"Ah, yes," Markson said.

Mrs. Hastings smiled at Lannigan. "Betty said you were a really wonderful person, and she thought you might be able to help us. You do believe she's innocent, of course?"

Lannigan hunched his wide shoulders. "I don't know," he said. "I want to think she's innocent. But leave us face it, I wasn't anywhere near the apartment when Blandy was killed."

Mrs. Hastings looked crushed; brightened when Lannigan added: "However, there are a couple of things in her favor—a decent cop who's willing to be wrong about her, and a man with a pockmarked face."

The three exchanged a glance. It was an even exchange; nothing. Mrs. Hastings asked: "What about this man with the pockmarked face? Betty didn't mention him."

"She doesn't know about him," Lannigan explained, going on to place this character. "It's nothing to get built up over, unless we can locate him. Inspector Artell is working on that now."

JIM HASTINGS found his voice, high-pitched and nasal. "What's your theory of the crime, old man?" he asked.

Lannigan snorted. "Look, folks, I'm a gripman on a cable car; where do I get off, having theories?"

T. V. Markson belched a cloud of blue

cigar smoke. "Still you must have some convictions."

"No," Lannigan swung his head. "But until somebody proves different, I go along with Betty's story. There's a hot half-million dollars that figures in this."

Markson's heavy lips hung loose and wet. "H-half a million," he stammered as though he couldn't believe it.

Lannigan nodded. "Yeah, what Blandy and his partner stole from the bank. According to Artell, the loot is still kicking around somewhere. In my book, it's plenty of reason for Blandy to be knocked off."

"I don't believe I quite follow you," said Mrs. Hastings, eager to be led.

"I may be wrong," Lannigan explained, "but five hundred grand isn't a sum you leave in a hollow tree or under a rock for five years. A couple of guys smart enough to dream up the racket Blandy and White were working would have a safe place to keep their money, probably with a third party they thought they could trust. But after White died in prison, this third party got a taste of how pleasant it'd be to latch onto the whole half-million. What if Blandy happened to die—say because his wife knifed him in a family brawl?"

Hastings laughed. "I thought you didn't have any theories, Mr. Lannigan."

"Okay," Lannigan drawled, "if you want to call it a theory, you're welcome. Right now, it's only a raw hunch."

Hastings nodded to his wife. "You know, I think Mr. Lannigan may have something. Remember what I told you at the time of Peter's trial?"

The lady nodded wisely. T. V. Markson cleared his throat. "That might be of interest to all of us," he said.

Hastings smiled. "Well, I don't recall my exact language, but in substance it was much the same thing Mr. Lannigan has said. I was suspicious of White's boss. Form-Tru Brassieres dropped out of the market shortly after the trial, but John Kingsley, who was president of the firm, went on being a big man socially down south. Always throwing

lavish parties at his Bel Air place. That takes important money."

"You mean Blandy and White were merely Kingsley's dupes?" Markson asked.

"As Mr. Lannigan would say," Hastings smiled again, "that's my raw hunch."

T. V. Markson rose to his full five-foot-three-and-a-quarter inches. "Well, I believe this has been an extremely productive talk," he said. "I'm encouraged, definitely encouraged. We have a starting point, now . . . yes, indeed!"

The Hastings got up, too. Mrs. Hastings said: "Thank you, Mr. Lannigan. I'm sure my sister was very fortunate to have met you last night."

Lannigan shook his head as he followed them to the door. "There are several ways to look at that," he said. "Remember, I'm the chump who talked Betty into trying to patch things up with her husband."

CHAPTER IV

ROARING TRUCK



WHEN his visitors were gone, Lannigan looked at his watch. He had a date to keep with an ancient old girl with green and white paint peeling off her sides. He knew what to expect at the car barn. A fat ribbing from all hands, led by Barolini.

The conductor didn't let him down. "Hey, look who's here," Barolini cried when he caught sight of Lannigan. "Our big newspaper celebrity! How about that!"

The guys crowded around, demanding the *inside* on what had happened. Lannigan grinned. "If you jokers read the papers, you know more about it than I do."

"Don't give us that, Lannigan," said one of the barn crew. "You was there, wasn't ya?"

Barolini stepped in front of Lannigan. "Leave 'im alone!" he shouted. He put a hand on his hip. "Can't you see our boy has had a trying night?"

Lannigan bunted the conductor's broad stern with his knee, sprawling him into the audience. "All right," he said, "here it is. . . ."

He told them about meeting Betty, taking her home and then finding her in the apartment with her dead husband. He skipped his hunches and talks with Artell and the Hastingses from Los Angeles.

"Do you think she stabbed him?" one of the guys wanted to know.

"Somebody sure did," Lannigan replied, pushing through the circle of men.

"Come on," he said to Barolini, "let's get Grandfather's Folly and go railroadin'."

The conductor wasn't satisfied. He didn't say anything during their first couple of trips; maybe because he was too busy climbing around over the car collecting fares. But as they were catching a smoke at the end of the line, Barolini exploded: "You're holding out on me, Lannigan. What's with you and the dame?"

"Me and the dame? What do you mean?"

"Why'd you take her home last night?"

"Because she was afraid to go alone."

"She just walked up and said, 'Mister, you got a kind face. Will you take me home? I'm afraid of the dark?'"

Lannigan chuckled. "You must've been listening."

"Okay," scowled Barolini, "if that's how you're going to be, *don't* talk!" He walked to the back end of the car and slammed the sliding door.

Except for Barolini's black, Italian sulk, the rest of Lannigan's night was strictly routine. Fourteen minutes from Powell and Market to Bay and Taylor down by Fishermen's Wharf; two-minute layover at both ends of the line.

It was a long night for Lannigan; he wanted to talk to Inspector Al Artell

about this John Kingsley development. He'd had a lot of time to think, now that Barolini wasn't speaking.

They rolled onto the turntable at Bay and Taylor for the last time about one o'clock. A Diesel switch-engine was banging some freight cars around in the Embarcadero tracks; otherwise the docks were quiet. The warehouses and factories were dark, nobody in the streets. On the bay, foghorns were bleating their brains out.

Lannigan stepped down, took hold of a corner of the car and helped Barolini swing the turnable. When he walked to the back end, the conductor was already set to push, his eyes sullen, avoiding Lannigan.

"Look," said Lannigan, "how long can you act like a six-year-old about this?"

"How long can you act like a big shot?" snapped Barolini. "Come on, let's put this show on the road."

Lannigan shrugged and leaned against the cable car, braced his legs. Then, too fast for Lannigan to know what came first—the roar of the engine or the blinding headlights—a truck swung around the corner. Lannigan saw a heavy plank bumper, in front of the lights, rush toward them. He screamed at Barolini to jump, throwing himself away from the cable car. He rolled until he bumped against the curb.

THERE was a terrific crash, the sound of glass shattering. While he was still turning over in the street, Lannigan saw the cable car shoot up the track, its back platform dragging, and hit Barolini. The truck had stopped short, screeched into reverse and disappeared down Bay Street.

Lannigan raised his head numbly, came to his hands and knees. In the dim light filtering through the fog from the street lamp he could see Barolini lying on the turntable, very still.

He stumbled to him. "Sonny!" he cried. "Sonny, are you all right?"

Barolini's hand moved, he tried to sit up. There was blood at the corners of

his mouth. Lannigan got his arm behind his friend's shoulders, helped him. "It—it hurts like the devil, Lannigan," Barolini mumbled.

"We have to get you out of the street," Lannigan sobbed.

Barolini coughed blood.

Lannigan looked around. They could have been on the moon for all the crowd they attracted. Then he heard someone running. A cop pounded around the corner of the darkened Cable Car Cafe, saw them. "What happened?" he asked Lannigan.

"We were pushing our car off the turntable . . . a truck hit us," Lannigan said. "Here! Help me carry my conductor to the curb."

They put their hands under Barolini, picked him up as gently as possible and took him to the sidewalk. The cop asked: "Were you standing in front of your light?"

Lannigan shook his head. "No. Look, get an ambulance. I'll talk about it later!"

The cop said "Yeah," and trotted across the intersection to a police call box.

Barolini opened his eyes again. "That was rough, Skipper," he gasped through clenched teeth.

"There'll be an ambulance here in a minute," Lannigan said. "Hold on, Sonny."

Barolini nodded. "Y-you shoulda told me—to—to expect company, Lannigan," his mouth twisted with pain.

"Pal, I didn't—" Lannigan choked. The little conductor's body stiffened, his eyes, large and dark, looking into Lannigan's face—"know."

Barolini didn't hear him.

The cop was back. "There's an ambulance on the way," he said. "How's he doing?"

Lannigan stood up. "Sonny won't need the ambulance," he said quietly.

Terrence Lannigan got by the next couple of hours on nothing but nerve, filed his report of the accident and told Barolini's mother. He asked for the job.

It was the least he could do, knowing the driver of that truck had been after him, not Barolini.

Small comfort this would have been to the poor little Italian woman crying over her boy, even if Lannigan had made himself tell her.

He drove home, dragged his feet up the stairs to his apartment. He knew he should get in touch with Artell. Maybe if he called, the inspector could come out. Lannigan turned the key in the door of his apartment, stepped inside and shut the door. Mechanically, he moved through the dark hallway to the living room, snapped on a reading lamp.

Someone said: "Hello, Lannigan, I've been waiting for you."

Lannigan whirled. Inspector Artell was sitting in a chair by the window, smiling. "You're late tonight, Lannigan."

"Yeah." Lannigan dropped heavily on the davenport. "I won't ask you how you got in here, Inspector," he said, "or why. I'm glad to see you."

"That's a switch. What's on your mind?"

Lannigan fumbled a cigarette out of a crushed pack, lit it. "The reason I'm late, Inspector—I guess I'm lucky to be here at all. Some character drove a truck into the back of my cable car while the conductor and I were pushing it off the Bay Street turntable. The conductor's dead, a mighty sweet little guy named Barolini."

ARTELL was looking at him intently. "What happened to the truck?"

"It hauled freight out of there."

"Did you get the license number?"

"You're kidding, Inspector. I didn't see who was driving, either, but I know it was meant for me."

"Maybe a drunk?" suggested Artell.

Lannigan shook his head. "Not the way he squared off on us. So what do you make of it, Inspector?"

"I don't know, Lannigan, offhand. If you weren't the kind of a guy I think you are, it'd be easy."

Lannigan said: "Do that again, will you, Inspector—slowly?"

"I meant I don't think you're a killer. Maybe once, if the stakes were big enough, or somebody hurt you. But—"

Lannigan scrubbed his face with one big hand.

"I must be dotty," he said. "I hear you, but I can't put it together."

"Look," Artell said softly. "I'll tell you why I'm here. Then maybe you'll understand. This afternoon a man called up with a tip on the Blandy case. Said he worked with you on the cable car."

"Did he say his name was Barolini?" asked Lannigan, his throat suddenly dry.

"He didn't give his name, but he said you'd been giving out the word that you were quitting your job, you'd made a killing."

"What was he talking about?" Lannigan gasped. "All the money I've got in the world is what's left from last payday."

Artell nodded. "I figured it was some

crank. Every time a murder breaks in the papers, we get all kinds of volunteer help, most of it phony. But we have to follow it all up. So I came out and looked around your apartment."

"I suppose I ought to be sore about that," Lannigan remarked, trying to quiet a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Al Artell took a plain, business-size envelope out of his inside pocket. "Not unless you have a fast explanation for this," he said, opening the flap. He made a fan of thousand-dollar bills. "I found it stuck to the back of your bathroom mirror with scotch tape. New scotch tape."

Lannigan's eyes burned, the light in the room was too bright. "W-where?" he stammered.

"The mirror on your dresser in the bathroom, the envelope was stuck to the back of it. Ten grand. The bills are a Nineteen-Forty-four series, Lannigan. That's the year Blandy and White were

[Turn page]

"Being Buried Won't Bother Me Any, at Least Not Now—Because I'm Dead!"



THAT was an odd thing to tell a counterman in a diner—but Dan Freeman blurted it out because he meant it. In his hand he held a newspaper that printed his picture with the word "Victim" as a caption—and there was an accompanying story which read:

"Today Clarence Kolb and Vera Winters identified the body of a man slain by a hit and run driver as that of Miss Winters' former husband, Dan Freeman. Freeman was wanted for the murder of his partner, J. C. Hastings, a year ago.

"The body was badly mangled. Final proof of its identity was found when fingerprints, taken at the time of Freeman's arrest, tallied with those of the body. City officials—"

Dark laughter touched Dan Freeman at the look his words had painted on the counterman's face. Then the laughter was gone, and he was a slayer returned to the scene—to slay again! He ran out of the diner in order to be—

IN AT THE KILL

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

AN EXCITING NOVELET OF A MURDER FRAME—FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE!

convicted. So how did you acquire them?"

"I didn't," Lannigan shook his head numbly. "It must be a plant, Artell. I never had that much money."

"I'm sorry, Lannigan. That's not very good."

"What do you want me to say?" Lannigan flared. "I won it on a radio giveaway show? Look, you pick the lock and get in here; don't you think anybody else can do the same thing? I'm out of this apartment eight hours every day."

Artell was shaking his head slowly. "Lannigan, I've been a cop for over ten years and I never yet arrested a *guilty* man."

He stood up. "Come, let's go!"

Lannigan rose as though a noose were pulling him off the davenport. There was no strength in his legs. "Wait a minute, Inspector," he said. "What about the accident tonight? Did I arrange that, too?"

Artell looked at him levelly. "It's possible. *You're* here."

"And Barolini isn't," Lannigan added bitterly. He saw himself, the framed portrait Artell was looking at. An Old Master couldn't do it better. The character with the tip for the police had identified himself just enough to suggest Barolini; said Lannigan was suddenly in the chips. Now Barolini was lying in a North Beach undertaking parlor and Artell was holding a bundle that could link Lannigan to the Blandy killing. Lannigan remembered every word he'd said to the inspector in Betty Blandy's defense. It didn't sound good against this background.

Artell was saying, "Well, Lannigan, shall we shove off?"

"Yeah," Lannigan nodded. "I guess we might as well." He took a step in the detective's direction.

Artell smiled. "You won't give me any trouble, pal? I'd rather bring you in without bracelets."

LANNIGAN shook his head, held out his hands. "You'd better put 'em on.

I don't know what I'm going to think a minute from now."

The detective shrugged, drew a pair of cuffs out of his hip pocket. He glanced down to spring them open. He shouldn't have done that. Lannigan couldn't stop himself; he drove his left into the pit of Artell's stomach. The detective folded in the middle and Lannigan's right fist rocked against the inspector's jaw. Artell spun into the wall and slipped to the floor. He didn't move.

Lannigan looked at him; really frightened for the first time in his life. He'd cut himself adrift. He was strictly on his own now. Every cop in the city would be after him, and there'd be no conversation next time. They would shoot, and talk about it afterward.

The big gripman started for the bathroom. He would wet a towel and bring Artell around, tell him he was sorry he'd lost control. Yeah, and Artell would take him down to the Hall of Justice, lock him up and throw the key away.

Lannigan thought about Barolini's mother. She'd find out he was suspected of helping kill her boy and she'd be hurt more. Barolini wouldn't like that. No, Lannigan could almost hear Barolini: "What are you trying to do, knucklehead—break my old lady's heart again? Get off the dime. Find the guy that did it and beat his brains out for me!"

CHAPTER V

FISTS FOR KILLERS



NERVOUSLY Terrence Lannigan climbed into his coupe, snapped on the ignition and punched the starter button. He didn't know where he was going, but he wanted to be long gone when Artell came to. He'd just slipped the gear in mesh when the door opened and a gun followed by a man got into his act.

Lannigan thought: Artell!

Then the man said: "You die hard, Lannigan."

The inside of the coupe was dark. Lannigan strained his eyes, knew by the voice it wasn't Artell. The man fumbled with the dash panel, found the light switch. In the glow from the instruments, Lannigan saw a hungry, sharp face; pitted skin. His stomach churned and tried to tip over.

This was the man he had seen last night outside the Blandy apartment! The gun was jammed against Lannigan's side.

"Okay," the man said. "You were going for a ride. Don't let me stop you."

Lannigan nodded, put the car in low. At the first intersection he said: "Which way?"

The man had drawn back to the far corner of the seat, his gun pointed at Lannigan. "Lombard Street on Telegraph Hill," he said. "I'll tell you when to stop."

"What's up there?" asked Lannigan.

"Somebody wants to meet you. They are havin' a party and you're guest of honor."

"Who is it, John Kingsley, the big brassiere and embezzlement man from L. A.?"

"Yeah. How'd you guess?"

Lannigan drove through the Stockton Street tunnel. What he needed was a fat blowout or a traffic violation. Crossing Sutter he would run past a light. Any other time he would've had five cops in his hair. But tonight, huh-uh—not a rumble, except for the character with the gun.

"Do that again, sweetheart," he rasped, "and I'll put a slug behind your ear."

Lannigan turned at Lombard Street, meek as a Sunday driver with a State Highway Patrol car in his rearview mirror. They went up the hill, approached the end of the street where it drops off a couple hundred feet to the Embarcadero. Lannigan's hood friend said: "You can park behind that Caddy at the curb."

Lannigan nodded, said, "Yes, sir."

He stopped paralled with the Cadillac, backed carefully into a space about twice the length of his coupe. Lannigan straightened the wheels, dropped into low gear, came forward to within six or eight feet of the Cad's salmon-tail rear fenders. He eased his foot on the brake, let it slide off and jam down hard on the gas. The coupe jackrabbited up the back end of the Cadillac.

The gunzel bounced into the windshield. Lannigan reached across the wheel and grabbed the gun, swung his free fist into the man's face. The hood hit the glass again, went limp. For insurance, Lannigan got his knees on the seat, propped his boy in the corner and worked him over—good.

He dropped the gun in his coat pocket and got out. The Caddy's salmon-tail fenders were really swimming upstream now. His old coupe hung over the other car's bumper, its radiator bleeding into the gutter.

Lannigan walked away from the wreck, leaving the lights on. He had a choice of a couple of apartment houses the hood might have been taking him to. Lannigan tried the newest, biggest and most expensive-looking building first.

He studied the metal name tags on the mailboxes. Scored. T. V. Markson lived in the penthouse. Lannigan pressed his buzzer, waited. A speaker set in the polished brass panel came alive and croaked a metallic female voice at him.

"Who is it, please?"

What did he have to lose? By now every cop in the city and county of San Francisco was gunning for him. He said: "Terrence Lannigan. Markson's expecting me."

The electric lock on the door gnashed its teeth. Not too soon. He heard somebody across the street yelling about the accident. He put his shoulder to the heavy plate-glass door, went in and rode the elevator to the twelfth floor.

HE STEPPED out of the ornate cage into a small, private lobby just as the door on the other side opened. Mrs.

Hastings came out to take his hand and gush a little. She was wearing a deep maroon dinner dress, simple, with rhinestone or diamond clips at the throat. Her hair was different; softer, longer down her back than Lannigan remembered it.

"What a pleasant surprise," she said.

Lannigan leered. "I'm probably the last person in the world you expected."

"As a matter of fact, you are." The gal could hold a smile without egg showing on her pretty face. "I can't imagine how you ever found us . . ."

"No fooling?"

She took him into the apartment. Lannigan looked around. They were alone in a large room; picture windows, an open terrace, modern paintings, stone fireplace with a mammoth, circular davenport in front of it. Mrs. Hastings was chattering.

He stopped counting the furniture and listened.

"The hotel situation is impossible," she said, "but Mr. Markson was kind enough to let us camp out with him."

Lannigan nodded. "Some camp!"

Mrs. Hastings laughed. "Yes, isn't it! Can I get you a drink, Mr. Lannigan?"

"Yeah, that'd be swell."

He followed her to a large ebony chest with Chinese dragons carved on it. She opened the top, sides—a bar. Lannigan said: "Bourbon, neat."

She poured his drink, built herself a highball. She sipped the drink while Lannigan tossed off his. "Of course," she said, "you must know I'm bursting with curiosity. Did you bring me some news about Betty? Good news?"

"Where's your husband and Markson?"

She raised her shoulders prettily. "I

don't know. They deserted me. Man's business—or pleasure, I suppose."

"Like trying to kill me, for instance," cracked Lannigan. "That should have been fun."

Mrs. Hastings' face blanched beneath her heavy evening makeup. "I—I don't believe I understand."

"I'll enjoy telling you about it," Lannigan stated. "Tonight a truck was deliberately crashed into my cable car. It missed me and killed my conductor, one of my best friends. When I got home, Inspector Artell was waiting for me. He had found ten grand pasted to the back of a mirror in my bathroom. You see how beautifully that sets me up?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"I'll draw it for you," Lannigan said, his voice rising. "I've got ten grand I can't explain, so Artell figures there's something between Betty and me, that maybe we ganged up on her husband, killed him for his loot. Not only am I washed up as a witness for Betty, but I'm suspected of being an accomplice. Very bulky. And the clincher; I'm supposed to be killed in an accident so Betty can take the rap all alone."

Mrs. Hastings pressed her hands to her face. "I'm terribly confused, Mr. Lannigan," she wailed. "I don't understand what you're saying—particularly how my husband and Mr. Markson are involved."

"Remember a few minutes ago? You wondered how I found you here?" Lannigan grinned. "You were looking over my shoulder when I stepped out of the elevator. Who'd you expect to see?"

"Why, I—"

"A monkey with a pockmarked face, right?" Lannigan leered down at her. "I'll tell you about him, too, honey. I

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figure he's the joker who planted those Nineteen-Forty-Four series thousand-dollar bills in my apartment and called Artell."

"I don't know any such man," asserted Mrs. Hastings, elevating her chin. "But if I did, I still see no connection."

"Okay," said Lannigan. "When your husband and Markson heard they'd missed me in the accident, they had their hood stand by to see I was arrested, or if there were any slip-ups, he was to bring me here so they could finish me for sure."

Lannigan smiled. "Well, honey, there were a couple of slips. First Inspector Artell got careless, and then the hood."

"Now you, Lannigan, are careless."

The voice came from the room behind them. Lannigan whirled, saw Hastings and his dumpy attorney standing in the door to the terrace. Hastings had Lannigan covered with a highly polished little rod which didn't look particularly cute to Lannigan.

"You don't want to make any more fast moves," Hastings told him, smiling thinly, "unless you're in a hurry to get this over."

MRS. HASTINGS didn't wait to be told. She took the gun out of Lannigan's coat pocket and, like a well-trained beagle, carried it to her husband. He glanced at it as he and Markson were crossing the room to where Lannigan stood.

"Harry's gun," he said, stopping in front of Lannigan. "Where'd you get it?"

"If Harry is your pock-faced gunzel, I sort of borrowed it from him."

"Don't be funny with me, Lannigan,"

snapped Hastings. "I want to know what happened to Harry!"

Lannigan felt like a man on a high wire. He fixed his eyes on Hastings' face so he wouldn't see that shiny rod. He was sweating freely and his mouth tasted as though he had been smoking moldy newspapers. "Harry was all right the last I saw him," he managed to chirp drily. "Very peaceful."

"You'll be peaceful—unless you stop the double-talk," snarled Hastings. "Where is he?"

Lannigan cocked his head at the open terrace door. "Give a listen," he suggested. "Maybe you can answer your own question."

Far away, probably on Columbus Avenue but coming closer, they could hear sirens. Markson licked his fat lips nervously. Hastings laughed. "Grabbing at straws, aren't you, old man?"

"You're a cinch to find out," Lannigan replied evenly.

"They are getting louder," Mrs. Hastings observed.

"I'll see," said Markson. He waddled out to the terrace, strained to stand on tiptoe so he'd be able to look over the parapet. He stayed there until the sirens moaned and died in the street below.

Markson rushed back, his face flushed. "He's right!" he cried. "They are police, and they stopped in front!"

Lannigan folded his arms, leaned against the carved-ebony bar. He said: "How're we doing, masterminds?"

Markson ignored the crack, blowing his cork more than somewhat. "I won't be involved in this mess of yours, Hastings," he shrieked. "You'll have to get Lannigan out of here before the police arrive."

[Turn page]



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"Shut up! I'm trying to think," Hastings said.

"He's trying to think," Lannigan mimicked. "And while he's thinking, the cops are on their way up."

"I've had enough of you, Lannigan!"

Hastings raised the gun and chopped it across the side of Lannigan's jaw. The big gripman rolled with the blow, putting his shoulder and a prayer behind the sweeping left hand that found Hastings' solar plexus. It had to be now!

He heard Hastings gag for breath, saw the gun swing up for a shot. Lannigan latched onto the gun, smashed his free fist twice into Hastings' face. The gun came loose in Lannigan's hand as Hastings folded at his feet.

He stepped back, covering Markson and Mrs. Hastings; they hadn't moved. His mouth was full of blood and his jaw was beginning to throb where he'd been gun-whipped. He said: "Now, you people be nice and stay where you are."

Without taking his eyes off them, he knelt beside Hastings, removed Harry's rod. He dropped the spare in his pocket, backed to the wall. There was a panel beside the door with a speaker connecting with the front entrance downstairs. He pressed the button.

"Now hear this," Lannigan yelled into the speaker. "Now hear this! If you cops want to talk to the driver of the Dodge coupe that rammed the Caddy down there, you'll have to come up to the penthouse!"

He kept repeating until somebody beat on the door. "Open up! This is the police!"

Lannigan said: "Glad you boys could make it," as two large, uniformed cops tramped into the room. They saw his gun, stopped uncertainly.

"This isn't for you," Lannigan explained. "Come on in, I want to introduce you to some people—some killers."

A voice from the hall outside said:

"Am I invited, too, Lannigan?"

Artell sauntered through the door, sheepishly rubbing the side of his face.

Lannigan gasped, "Al, how did you get here so fast?"

THE detective shook his head. "I don't always lead with my chin, pal, but when it's necessary I can take a punch."

"Al, I'm sorry I—" Lannigan began.

"Skip it," Artell waved at him, grinning. "I thought I'd never get you to swing on me..."

"You mean you—"

"Look," Artell said, "I know you have a low opinion of cops, but we're not completely dumb. That ten grand was obviously a plant, but I had to know who made it. I figured if I let you escape, somebody would take another crack at you, and this time we'd be on their neck. You've got a good, Pier Six type right hand, Lannigan, but you swing from left field. So let's forget it—I want to meet your killers."

Lannigan introduced Mrs. Hastings and T. V. Markson. Hastings was still on the rug. His face was green and his breathing was labored. Lannigan reached down and ripped his shirt open. There was adhesive tape from his belt to his armpits.

"This ought to make a confession come easy," he told Artell. "Before I left the gunzel down in my car, I made sure he didn't have any cracked ribs. I knew somebody in this outfit had to be driving the truck that killed Barolini; and whoever it was, he would have a mighty tender middle. If you ever hit anything like a standing cable car, you know what I mean. I got a taste of it when I smacked that Caddy."

Artell smiled at him. "Lannigan, I'm afraid you're working for the wrong department of the City."

"That's what you think, Inspector," Lannigan replied. "I wouldn't go through this again—for wages!"



Powerful arms hurled me
into the sea

MAN OVERBOARD

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

"That eerie cry would always remind me of murder at sea. . . ."

THE Victory ship *Manelik*, now under British registry and with a British crew, rolled and pitched its way northward, following the Great Circle Track from Belem, Brazil. I had never known the sea to be so rough. Even the Scotch engineer was under the weather. I was the only passenger to eat any supper, and I now sat in the tiny smoking room, trying to read. Another occupant was a British assistant steward, sprawled out on the transom, facing

the bulkhead, his rump and heels hanging over the transom's edge.

My name is George Premly. I was heading home after spending a year exploring the jungles in the Amazon Valley. It was good to be going home, good to feel the roll and pitch under one, to know oneself safe from the deep and the outer darkness.

The *Manelik* hit a particularly big one. She shuddered in all her parts as if she would go to pieces. I stared at the sleep-

ing man, whose name was Robert Gordon, amazed that he responded not at all to the protests of the *Manelik*. Right there I began to be ever so little afraid, without being able to explain it on any logical grounds.

The door leading to the gangway was closed. I don't know just why I got up and tried it. It was locked! I had a feeling of some weird net being drawn around me. I grabbed Gordon, shook him.

He rolled limply off the transom onto the desk. It was then that I saw the neat hole made by a small calibre bullet behind his left ear. I could not see where the bullet came out, if it had. The man's facial expression was one of slight surprise, which was the expression he always wore.

I looked around for the weapon. Of course it was foolish of me to pick up the .22 target pistol wedged down behind the cushion of the transom, but I could scarcely be expected to react intelligently under the circumstances. Quickly the thought went through me that someone had looked in at me through the port, and possibly might have seen the body of Gordon.

The door being shut—who was trying to put something over on me? I had helped by picking up the pistol, leaving my prints on it, rubbing off those of the murderer. Of course it could have been suicide, but I remembered that Gordon was right-handed.

I remembered something else. When a crime was committed at sea, it was punishable, so I had been told, by the laws of the port toward which the steamer was headed. Murder, in New York, meant the electric chair! Terror rose inside me like the waves out in the black night.

The target pistol I had seen many times during the five days we had been at sea. Everybody aboard used it to shoot at sharks. I had handled it myself several times.

I tried the door again, and now it was unlocked!

I'M A criminologist in an amateurish sort of way and it was time for me to get busy. I stepped out into the gangway, heading for my own stateroom. I always kept it locked because I had valuable materials in my suitcase. But it wasn't locked now! It was hooked open and there was a light inside! I moved toward the door, when the light went out. I flung myself against the bulkhead, fury rising in me. When the intruder—who must be an official—came out I was going to slug him.

But he didn't come out. Instead, the door was unhooked by a hairy hand. Before I could grab it, or risk my hand in the black space, the door closed. I heard the latch click. The *Manelik* heeled further over than before. Somebody had taken possession of my stateroom. It was almost as if he knew I was not going to use it again.

There was only one man aboard who could handle this odd situation, and it was his pidgin anyway: Captain Harley Grange. Nobody liked him, because he was a hard taskmaster, and a petty tyrant. But he did get things done. His officers and crew men were afraid of him. He had authority. He could, if he wished, withhold their pay, beyond bare expenses, until they went back to England, and for some of them that would be two years hence.

I went to the captain's cabin. He wasn't in it. I hurried to the bridge, unable to find either the first mate or the steward. Waves were breaking even over the bridge, thirty feet and more above the ocean. Frederick Kelly, the second officer, was on the bridge.

I reported the murder to him.

"You wouldn't be seeing ghosts, would you?" He grinned at me. "This is the kind of a night for it."

"Go take a look," I said. "Gordon is still there, unless he's been moved within the last ten minutes."

The second shrugged. "I'm on duty," he said. "But if you're sure, you'd better notify the captain. He and the mate are 'tween decks, checking the stowage of

the cargo. You'd be sure to catch them if you went right straight down by the midship ladders, and forward to meet them. Trouble is, there are no lights. Blacker'n the inside of a shark. But they'll have flashlights and be easier to see."

I could just imagine myself going down to the deck next below the well-deck, into cargo that might shift right onto me with any roll of the *Manelik*, in the darkness besides. I thought I'd follow the captain instead, though I didn't look forward with much enthusiasm to the waves across the cluttered welldeck.

I went on out, down the ladder from the bridge. A wave broke over me even above the main deck. It wasn't a wave, not really, just the smear of it after it crashed tons and tons of black water against the starboard side of the *Manelik*. Overside I couldn't see a thing. I just knew that a storm raged out there.

I remembered looking at our position on the chart. The sea, at this point, was slightly over three miles deep. The thought, for some reason, made me feel inadequate to any problem.

I went down the ladder to the welldeck, swung left and clung to the steps at well-deck level while a wave rolled inexorably over the *Manelik*, burying booms, cables, separating the main decks from the fore-castle so that, in what brief light there was, high on spars, it looked as if the ship had broken in two.

Then the *Manelik* lifted, became a whole ship again and I was soaked to the skin, lucky to have had something to cling to, lucky to be still aboard.

I started my race forward. My timing missed, for there was a wave right in front of my nose. The sea is above and beyond time. My nearest refuge was the rail. I almost had to dive into the wave to catch it. I got both hands on the rail, gripping with all my might, when the wave rolled aboard. I didn't believe my hands would hang on as the wave kicked my feet from under me and spun me like a top, as if trying to untwist my hands.

You have to be spun by a wave like that to know just what it makes a man feel.

Then I had my feet on the deck. I was gasping, spent.

ARMS grabbed me about the knees as my hands came free, lifting me so quickly I didn't have a chance to grab the rail again. Those arms were powerful. I was overside then, screaming.

I yelled, "Man overboard!" though how I happened to react that way I don't know. "Help! Man overboard!"

I yelled without hope. I hit the warm water. I thought I heard someone repeat my cry. Then I surfaced and the starboard side of the *Manelik* rolled past me in the night. Behind the steamer a big wave lifted me high, so that from its crest I could look down on the vessel, moving on through the night toward New York without me.

The nearest land, remember, was three miles down!

Pitch darkness possessed the sea around me, with the *Manelik's* riding lights dimming out in the noisy gloom ahead. I rose and fell through terrific space, swimming easily, knowing it useless. Only tonight the captain had said:

"If anything happens to a man this far at sea and he goes overboard, it's best if he can't swim and prolong the agony."

Yet there I was, swimming as strongly as if I fully expected to outlive the ghastly experience of feeling for land so blackly far away below.

I tried not to think of the sharks at which we had fired daily with the murder weapon!

I gulped the salt water, gagged. Now the wind spun me and the waves, and I didn't know where the *Manelik* was, and it didn't matter. If I was wise I'd dip my head and swim straight down until unconscious. But one's body likes to live, fights to survive. Mine did. My arms worked just as strongly as they could propel me. Yet a ship could pass right over my head and I could yell my best and nobody would hear me.

I didn't intend, though, to lose my nerve. But somehow, there in the sea, I had an awful time keeping myself sold on the proposition that death is not fearful. I was afraid, and trying my level best to kid myself that I wasn't.

My clothes were beginning to weigh me down, too, and I wanted to kick off my shoes, but a white body was such a lure to sharks! I kept on my shoes and clothes.

Who had heaved me overside? I hadn't seen him. He hadn't said a word. Two men had known I was going out to the welldeck—the second mate and the helmsman, whom I had scarcely noticed. All I had seen of the quartermaster, really, was his back as he tried to see what the *Manelik* nosed into in the blackness ahead.

There was a keening sound from back the way we had come, from the south, the direction of Belem. I was dreaming, or it was the siren of the *Manelik*! I had not liked Captain Harley Grange, but now I was glad for a moment of his meticulous attention to rules of the sea.

Then, it was crazy, but I heard oars in rowlocks! Then a hail, coming down the wind like the voices of dead men:

"Premly! Premly!"

I raised as high in the water as I could, prayed for sharks to lay off for five minutes more.

"Help! Help!" I bawled.

I could scarcely hear my own voice in the wind. I had heard my name called because the sound came with the wind. I tried again:

"Help! Help!"

With each syllable of my shout the waves slapped me across the mouth.

Then all at once a searchlight threw its powerful beam onto the sea, played it around. The light showed the *Manelik* towering far above me.

I saw a man in the bow of a lifeboat, nearby. He hurled something straight at me—a life preserver—which raced down the waves toward my hands.

Next the boat slapped the water right beside me. Hands grabbed me, dragged

me aboard. I swear sharks left the water to grab me—and just missed!

HOW that boat remained afloat I don't know, for I passed out, then.

I regained consciousness as the boat was being reeled up the davits. I sat up as we came level with the main deck and managed to help myself a little as I was pushed out to the deck.

Then Captain Harley Grange was beside me, natty as always, prissy as he couldn't help being.

"Rough ride, eh?" he said. "How come you took it?"

I clutched him by the arms, told what had happened. He seemed not to have heard about Gordon. He whirled and led the way to the smoking room. We stared down at Gordon, rolling with the *Manelik*.

"We'll start investigation with the steward," he said. "Then we'll muster officers and crew."

The *Manelik* was under weigh again, rolling and pitching. It banged the captain and me against the smoking room bulkheads. It slammed the corpse against the transom, the head giving off a thudding sound.

The steward, Mr. Jamie Van Hoos, wasn't in his cabin. He hadn't been when I went hunting him, either, I remembered.

"Go change, Premly," said Grange, "into dry clothes. Then muster with the others."

I hurried to my cabin, let myself in, and locked the door behind me. There were two ways from the smoking room to my cabin; I thought about that later.

Not until I heard the hoarse breathing did I remember the hairy hand which had unhooked the door earlier tonight! There were two bunks in my room. The hoarse breathing came from the lower. As I straightened, reached for the light switch, the hands got me by the throat. In the blackness of my spinning cabin I was fighting against another kind of strangulation—held away from the door so that I could not bang against it to at-

tract attention.

The murderer! I only knew there was no mistaking the intent of the strangling hands.

I thought I kept my wits about me very well, considering. This man, unless he was a stowaway, would have to report for muster. The gong was going now outside, summoning all hands. If this man, whoever he was, wasn't present to have his nose counted, there would be questions he would never be able to answer.

On the other hand did he now dare murder me? He had gone into my room before, I believe, to await my entrance. kill me and toss me overboard.

Hairy hand. Half the crew was Brazilian, all had hairy hands. This man was strong, and big, for a Brazilian. He wrestled me away from the door and I raked my nails across his face. I would mark him, anyhow. I prayed it would give me something to point at, at muster. But other men might be marked in the storm, in line of duty.

I grabbed the attacker's hair and yanked. I kept some of his hair in my fingers.

The man in the dark brought his knee up into my abdomen. I hadn't expected that and he got me fair. I doubled up in agony and he got his left arm around my neck, choking me. I clawed at the carpet.

My clutching fingers grasped something on the floor, something round and hard, and another idea came. Some of my *tento* beans, seeds of a plant I had gathered, in Brazil for a necklace for a girl friend, had spilled on the deck this afternoon. Apparently I hadn't got them all back into the bag.

I picked up the two under my hand. My attacker had his fingers in my hair now and was banging my head against the floor.

I SAW plenty of stars, for he was strong and that carpet wasn't as thick as I had feared it was when I was banging his head against the floor! I man-

aged to push the two scarlet *tento* beans into one of the pockets of his shorts. Later at muster I'd insist that men turn out their pockets. If I got to muster! This man wanted to brain me and make it in time himself.

I fought my best. In my last strangling moment of lucidity, I saw the luminous dial of the man's wrist-watch. His hands were back at my throat. The time was ten fifteen p.m. Then the hands faded, and the luminous dial, and so did I, going under, into the blackness of oblivion.

I looked at my own watch when I came awake. But my watch was not water proof and the long sea bath had not helped it. It said nine thirty.

I got to my feet, staggering, my head like a balloon filled with hot coals. I turned on the light. Then I looked at my hands. They were wrinkled and pale with the salt water which now chilled my whole body—but several strands of hair clung to the right one! I shook as with the ague while I picked off those hairs and dropped them into an envelope.

My throat was numb.

I got to the door. It was locked. I couldn't find the key. I leaned weakly against the door, trying not to burst into tears. The attacker had made sure I didn't get out soon, so he must have known I was alive when he left.

I drew back from the door preparatory to attacking it with my fists and feet. I had some ideas and I wasn't going to see them lost just because I was a prisoner. I kicked, kicked again.

A most peculiar thing happened.

A key was pushed under my door from outside! In the eye of my mind I could see the person who did it, running away before I could get the door open. And this thought made me fumble, lose time, so that when I finally pulled the door back there was no one in the passageway. Only the sound of the sea came from my right where a heavy steel door held back the waves that still washed over the welldeck.

Where was the muster being held?

The officers, I felt, would be in the dining room. There were eight of them, including the captain. I hurried up, but the dining room was dark. I switched on the light, looked at the wall clock. Eleven fifteen. I had been out much longer than I thought. Why hadn't the attacker, with my key, returned to finish his job? Probably he had completely cleared himself now, or proved it an accident and the whole thing was over and done with.

I went hunting the steward again, but his cabin was empty. The light was on. I went hunting the others. The captain was not in his cabin or on the bridge. The second officer was still on duty, and surly.

"Another murder to report, perhaps?" he snarled at me.

"Then at last you *do* admit it's murder?" I said.

"The captain said so, a few minutes ago," he replied. "That puts it in his hands. Now, if you'll be good enough to leave the bridge?"

HE DIDN'T tell me where to find the captain. I thought I'd try the steward again. This time he was in, sitting at his table, apparently deep in thought, staring at space. He lifted his head slowly as I pushed aside the curtains and his right hand moved a little on the tabletop. "Oh!" I said. "Too bad about Gordon. Have you any idea where the captain is?"

I stared. His face was scratched. He raised his hand to his cheeks and said: "Half the crew is scratched up tonight. The captain is 'tween decks, solving Robie's murder all by himself. Never trusts anybody else. I'd take you, but I have accounts to audit."

He told me how to join the captain. His instructions were explicit.

"There'll be a light over his table," he said. "There are bins of Brazil nuts, crates of rubber balls. They're making quite a fuss in the storm, but don't be concerned, they're quite secure. Better take your flashlight, though. You have one?"

I told him I had. I left him. Something I had seen had caused me to alter my plans a little. He had moved his right hand, remember, when I stepped in on him.

He had done it to cover two *tento* seeds of scarlet, identical with those I had pushed into the pockets of my attacker. Of course, there could be other *tento* seeds aboard; these could quite easily be others of mine.

I called myself all kinds of a fool as I found my way to the 'tween decks, an egotistical fool, as cocky in my own way as the captain was in his.

Down in the cargo I wished at once I had stayed in my cabin, minding my own business. I played the beam of my flashlight over the cargo, beginning near the stern, working my way forward. Far up there I thought I could see a beam of light, but no sooner had I seen it than it was gone. Up there near the forecastle the prissy captain was fingerprinting the crew—so the steward had told me. But I didn't exactly believe him. I thought he had deliberately sent me 'tween decks in order that the job which had failed when I had been thrown overboard might be completed.

It was tough going below. The ship stood on her beam ends. Even through all the groaning, moaning cargo, I could hear the wind, the smashing of the waves in the welldeck. I flashed the beam of the light over the cargo nearest me.

A huge hardwood bin of balls of solid rubber, each ball weighing perhaps seventy pounds, occupied space to my right. As the *Manelik* heeled over to port those thick hardwood boards, reinforced by cables, bowed outward under the weight of the rubber. I could just imagine what it would be like if that one bin broke and the mighty solid rubber balls were thus freed—they would possess all of the 'tween decks, crashing from side to side as the *Manelik* rolled, from end to end as she pitched. If even that one bin broke that rubber would smash every crate and bin, box and cage in the place,

and bedlam unbelievable would possess the ship. Nothing could live in such a mess. No piece of machinery would survive.

I went on past the bin, came head on against another, built squarely amidships. Some master mechanic had worked out a system of balancing that was good.

I smashed into bins so hard their boards left prints on my skin.

From somewhere a rubber ball got loose. I heard it hit in the darkness where I had just been, go bounding off into the stern. It would come back when the ship pitched—strike the hardwood boards of the bins!

I started back. I could surely handle one ball. Then I came up standing. How did I know the ball hadn't been dropped where the murderer thought I was?

I ran out at the far end and the returning ball sped past me in the dark, crashing hard against a bin piled high with Brazil nuts. The board struck by the solid rubber broke! Nuts began to spill on the deck. If that thing hit a bin of rubber!

I saw a light now, raced toward it. I practically burst around a bin of sacked *farinha* into the glare of light cast by two high-voltage bulbs, caged, lying on the table the captain was using.

THERE was only one man with him: the chief steward, who had not the time to show me where the captain worked! Of course, the captain could

have sent for him. There was no one else. The table, instead of being near the forecabin, was separated from it by a third of the long weldeck, by bin after bin, staggered so that the lights could not be seen from the forecabin through the bins.

Captain Harley Grange held the murder weapon in his hand, staring at it. He didn't look surprised, when I appeared. He turned to the steward and snapped:

"All right, secure that ball of rubber and return here!"

The steward vanished into the darkness without looking at me.

"That man's a murderer!" I told the captain. "You've let him go without waiting for my report."

The *tento* seeds—presumably the same ones—were on the table in front of the captain. Why the steward had brought them I did not know, but they gave me a reason to explain the whole thing to the skipper—including the scratched face of the steward.

"Scratched faces mean nothing," said Grange. "My face is scratched, too. So are the faces of half the officers and men. It's a bit rough, you know."

"You mean you won't listen to me," I said. I wanted to produce the hair I'd yanked from my cabin attacker.

"I am captain of this ship," said Grange. "I conduct my own investigations, find my own murderers! When I want Yankee help, I'll ask for it."

The steward came back and I began

[Turn page]

AMAZING THING! By Cooper

SENSATIONAL NEW **TING**
CREAM FOR

FOOT ITCH

- REGULAR USE HELPS
RELIEVE ITCHING-SOOTHES
BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED

PEELING TOES-
AIDS HEALING
AMAZINGLY!



DURING
WAR USED
IN HOSPITALS
NOW

RELEASED TO
DRUGGISTS
**GUARANTEED
TING MUST**

SATISFY YOU IN
A WEEK-OR
MONEY BACK!



IN LAB TESTS
TING CREAM
PROVED EFFECTIVE
IN KILLING SPECIFIC
TYPES OF
ATHLETE'S FOOT
FUNGI ON
60 SECOND
CONTACT!

EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS
HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING
TING CREAM TODAY!
GROSSLESS, STAINLESS
ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE.

Ting

to speak my piece. It was some comfort to have the steward there. He, like the others, hated Grange.

"Your trick didn't work, did it, Captain?" I said. "So now, with the help of the steward, you're going to make it stick. You killed Robie Gordon because he had discovered you were spending the dollars held back over a period of months from the pay of your officers and men. Robie accused you of it tonight. I know, because Robie told me he knew. He meant to give you a chance to deny it, or make restitution, before he told the officers and crew. He didn't wish a captain, even one as cordially disliked as you, to be disgraced. Neither, for that matter, do I, or the steward."

I LOOKED at the standing steward. He stared straight ahead like a man standing at attention or in a trance.

"You shot Robie, Captain! You tossed me overboard, then ordered a boat away believing it useless. I pushed those *tento* beans into *your* pocket! You found them there, understood, gave them to the steward, told him, perhaps, that you suspected me of the murder. You told him to allow me the merest glimpse of them, for purposes of your own. You thought I'd be sure for some reason that the *steward* was the murderer! And so I would have thought if Robie hadn't told me about your embezzlements and asked my advice. So, I sent him to his death, never suspecting, or knowing that he was going to do it tonight—and get himself killed! Don't you think you'd best hand me that pistol, Captain Grange?"

He hefted the pistol, grinning.

"You're a hard man to kill, Mr. Premly," he said. "Now I have to make sure of both you and the steward."

I made my move then, cracked my flashlight down on the pistol, got it myself. I covered Grange, while the steward looked like a man condemned to death.

"I have no scruples about shooting, Grange," I said. "Steward, you can't

make a stand against your captain, but you can't evade the command of a pistol, either. And Captain, when I came down to you, I left a note in the mirror of my cabin, telling who the murderer is! It would of course have been found when the steward cleared up my room tomorrow."

"I'd have gone back and searched your cabin," snapped Grange, "if you hadn't jumped me before I could kill you! Well, let's go. But what are you going to do with me when you get me into the dark area, Premly?"

I hadn't thought of that. Now I did. I banged the captain behind the ear. The steward helped me drag him forward to the ladder.

"If he turns out innocent," said the steward, "my goose is cooked!"

We got the skipper up into the well-deck. It would be impossible to drag him and fight the waves, too. We clung to him until a wave passed over. I felt him fighting it, knew he would be conscious when he emerged.

HE GOT to his feet, shaking his head like an angry bull.

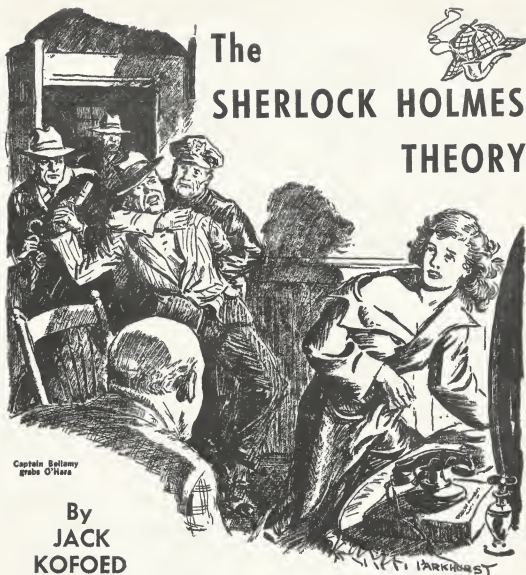
"Offhand, Mr. Premly," he said, "I doubt if the target pistol will work, now that it has been water-salted!"

I guess I wouldn't have used it anyway. Captain Grange turned, made a short dash, went overside. I heard someone yelling. I yelled too, a cry that was acted upon, but without result—without result because, for a few vital moments, there was no captain to call a boat away. By the time the mate took over everybody knew it was too late. But the boat sped away into the night, returned without Grange.

As we churned on, pitching and rolling, toward New York, the first mate in command, I could still hear the eerie cry which I would hear in dreams all the rest of my life:

"Man overboard! Man overboardrrrr!" riding down the wind.

It would always remind me of murder at sea.



Captain Bellamy
greets O'Hara

By
**JACK
KOFOED**

ONE evening Baldy Simmons is having dinner with Julie Hart, who dances in night clubs for a living, when Captain Peter Bellamy, of the Homicide Squad, comes wearily to their table and sits down. The reason Captain Bellamy is weary is because practically every time he turns around

some citizen of Manhattan kills another citizen in streets or hotels or bar-rooms.

Bellamy is getting very tired of this, because the newspapers are beginning to ask what in goodness name the Homicide detail is doing—playing gin or something? And the Police Commissioner is making remarks no decent

Baldy Simmons, the sage of Broadway, faces the fury of an armed killer in the dressing room of Julie Hart, dancer!

family paper dares print.

"Were it not that I have only three more years to go before starting to draw a pension, I walk straight down to West Street and jump into the river," Bellamy insists.

"Look," says Baldy, "you are a fine officer. You use all modern methods like fingerprinting, laboratory analyses and such things, but sometimes it seems to me you miss on the more obvious things. Why not, say on the next murder, take a leaf from the book of Sherlock Holmes. It is considered smart to sniff at the old boy, but it must be admitted his batting average is very high, indeed."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning even a phrase here and there is often the solution of a problem—and observation and deduction are not words to lie fallow in a dictionary."

Captain Bellamy orders a Moscow Mule, and looks at Miss Julie Hart, whose lovely face makes almost any man forget his woes and the upsets of life.

"Do you know what my dear, bald-headed friend is talking about?" he asks.

Miss Julie Hart spears a stalk of asparagus covered with Hollandaise sauce, and nibbles it daintily.

"All I know," she says, "is that I listen attentively to Mr. Simmons, and learn something every day. Crime, however, is a little out of my line, even though, while working in Kansas City, I meet some very naughty boys. However, if Baldy says it is possible to catch a murderer by working on a couple of words, I believe him. I believe anything he says."

"What a spot to be in with a gorgeous hunk like you," mutters the Captain wistfully.

THE bar of the Cafe Moderne is semi-circular and of blond wood. The stools before it make a brave, modernistic show in chromium and red leather. Only three or four people are gathered around, drinking and chatting, for the cafe is a late spot, and it is now hardly

more than ten o'clock. In the opposite wall is a door leading to the gambling room. A guard stands there, a bulky man, with enough stomach to spoil the fit of his tuxedo.

Baldy is having a nightcap with Julie when three men shoulder up to the bar, and order Scotch. They are quite average looking men, and Mr. Simmons does not recognize them, though he knows practically everyone of any consequence on Broadway. One has a kind of pickax nose and little black mule eyes. The second looks like a dumb cluck, with the shoulders of a wrestler. The last is a mild looking gazoo, with blond hair and washed out blue eyes.

They do not appear to be very interesting, while Julie is, so the bald one pays no further attention to them. Mule eyes says, "Make sure you do not foul this up, Hippo," but Mr. Simmons pays no attention, for he is talking about his companion's engagement at the Mocambo, where she is due very shortly to do her act, while Mr. Simmons goes home for a little shuteye.

The lad with the schnozzola looks over, and says, "Hello, Julie," in a voice that sounds like a nail scratching on slate. "I do not expect to see you here. As a matter of fact, I do not expect to see anyone I know. Are you still good at keeping that pretty trap of yours shut?"

Miss Hart nods, almost as if hypnotized.

"Beat it, then," says Pickax, "and never forget what happens to Kitty Kilduff."

Baldy is about to take umbrage at this remark, and maybe belt this character one where it does the most good, but the man and his two companions start toward the door of the gambling room.

"Pay the check quick, and let us get out of here," Julie says.

Just as the bartender reaches for the tab, Baldy sees the trio brush by the guard. It seems as though the guard starts reaching for his equalizer, but

they push him inside with them.

"Now, what—" Mr. Simmons begins, but the lady whispers, "This is no time to talk." They hustle outside into a cab, which is one of those two way radio affairs.

"Look," says Baldy to the jockey. "Call your office right away, and have them get in touch with the police. It looks like the beginning of a holdup in there."

The driver has trouble with his gadgets, and it takes a couple of minutes before he locates the radio operator at the other end.

"All right," Mr. Simmons goes on. "Pull across the street and wait there. If the police do not arrive before these jokers come out, we follow them."

"No, no," cries Julie. "If they see us, I am a cooked goose. Please, let us get out of here."

The taxi jockey turns around, and looks back into the cab.

"Listen, mister," he said. "I ain't a hero and I do not wish to be a hero. If there are guys with guns in there let them go their own way. I go the other. We tip the police, and that is all expected of any good citizen. Please tell me where you want to go right now, or get out."

Mr. Simmons gives in.

"Lindy's. I feel like a salami on rye. Drop me there, and take Miss Hart to the Mocambo." When they are on their way, he asks gently. "What gives, baby? If those jokers really pull a job in the Moderne, and get away before the cops arrive you, at least, are able to put the finger on them."

"This," says Julie, "I refuse to do."

BALDY explains slowly and carefully that her approach is all wrong. It is the duty of every citizen to help apprehend such people as murderers, thieves and kidnapers. Besides, Captain Bellamy's nervous system is in very poor shape as it is, and another sad affair is likely to put it out of kilter altogether. In addition, Mr. Simmons points out, if

the hoodlums are clapped into jail, Miss Hart is as safe as a royal flush in a poker game. But, Julie is obdurate.

"You talk till you are hoarse, Baldy, and that is all the good it does. I know what happened to Kitty Kilduff and you do not. If anything is figured out from a word or two, as you explain to Captain Bellamy, well and good, but those words are certain to be yours, not mine."

Next morning, sure enough, the blatters come out with a sensational story of what happens at the Moderne. Three men, none of whom is recognized by anybody, bust into the gambling room, and knock off thirty thousand fish. While they are distracted for a moment taking dough out of the safe the guard goes for his rod, and they blast him as full of holes as any sieve you ever see. The police arrive, but get there several minutes too late to apprehend the bad boys.

Descriptions of these predatory rascals are sketchy at best. After piecing together what they are able to discover, the police are quite as much in the dark as ever. Going around looking for a middle-sized blond man, a middle-sized one with black eyes and a husky one with wrestlers' shoulders is like seeking the well known needle in the equally well known haystack.

Baldy does not wish to get Julie in bad with the coppers for not telling what she knows. Julie is a very sweet kid, but is paralyzed with fright, and probably with more than good reason. The trick is to find out what she knows, and pass it on to Captain Bellamy, while not betraying the source. If he is able to work this out, Mr. Simmons also proves his contention that the Sherlock Holmes theory of observation and deduction is by no means as dead as a pickled herring.

Well, Baldy gives the old brain a thorough beating, and finally comes up with an idea. This does not arrive until mid-afternoon the day after the holdup and slaying. The mental steps go like this: Julie knows the black-eyed killer.

In some way he is tied up with a girl named Kitty Kilduff to whom a very unpleasant thing happens. The problem is how to discover mule-eye's name.

The key to the problem is the name "Kitty Kilduff." It is possible there are hundreds of damsels by this name in the United States, and tracking them all down is a Herculean task. However, since Julie spends the last year before coming to New York in Kansas City, it seems reasonable to believe the man she fears and this Kitty character at one time or another are citizens of KC. At any rate, this is a good assumption—and all of Mr. Sherlock Holmes' assumptions are based on pure reasoning, or an approximate facsimile of the same.

Baldy hires himself to police headquarters to see Captain Bellamy. Pete is unhappier than ever, with a new unsolved slaying on his hands, and not a single clue he is able to observe hanging around.

"For the moment," he admits, "I am sunk by at least a thousand fathoms deep. Even you, with all your detective theories, do not come up with a complete description of the guilty parties."

"Well," says Baldy, "at the time I have an opportunity to observe them closely they are only three joes having a drink, and I do not take stock of everyone I see hoisting a Scotch and soda."

THE captain moans softly around his tattered cigar.

"I turn to the stool-pigeons, and some of them are busting out in a sweat to do me a favor. Not one of them has any idea who the three heisters are. If you really are able to prove the Sherlock Holmes ideas are not only something in a book, this is certainly the best opportunity you are likely to have in a month of Thanksgivings."

"You may, indeed, be right," murmurs Mr. Simmons. "As a starter, I suggest you call the Kansas City police, and ask if they know anything about a gal named Kitty Kilduff, whom we suspect passed out of this life sometime

during the past twelve-month. Particularly get the dope on her men friends and such things."

Bellamy ruminates over that for a bit. "Kansas City, eh? The town has a ball club in the American Association, ships a lot of beef, and once has a noted massacre of gangsters. How do you figure it fits in with the affair at the Cafe Moderne?"

"Go ahead and see," says Baldy.

The homicide man knows Mr. Simmons is not a person to make this suggestion just to run up a long distance call to the police department. Even if his ideas about observation and deduction and other Sherlock Holmes methods sound screwy to an up-to-date cop, it is impossible to deny that Baldy is a very smart cookie, indeed. So, the captain puts in the call, tells what he wants, and they sit around chewing the fat until the KC boys call about a half hour later with all the information they are able to gather.

After he listens, and makes notes, Bellamy hangs up and speaks in this wise: "Miss Kitty Kilduff is a singer in one of the better traps, a very good looking dame with pipes that attract no little attention, along with her legs. It seems that Kitty has the misfortune to fall under a train some ten months or so back, and get killed. Her only boy friend is a character with a bad reputation. His name is Harry Bushel, and he is so upset by the accident he leaves Kansas City flat on its back. He is five feet eight inches tall, weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds, black hair, small black eyes, no particular identifying marks."

"There," says Baldy triumphantly, "is your man. I am willing to wager a grand or two he is the leader of the trio who stick up the Cafe Moderne. There is no possible doubt about it. Put the arm on Bushel, and you get the other two along with him. Now that you know who the guy is, maybe one of your stoolies is able to tell where he hangs out."

Captain Bellamy shakes his head.

"Sometimes I wonder about you, Baldy," he says. "Is it true that instead of riding in taxies you use a broom like the old witches used to do?"

The telephone jangles. Bellamy listens, mutters "Okay," and hangs up.

"Take another look in your crystal ball," he mutters. "They just find Bushel's body in his hotel room. He has a bullet between the eyes, probably put there by a gun with a silencer, because nobody hears a shot. Bushel is clean as a whistle, too—not a dime of the thirty thousand on him!"

WHAT Bellamy has heard throws the gaff right back into the fishermen's laps, because they have no information at all about Harry Bushel's associates. Chances are one or both bump him off for his share of the dough. Captain Bellamy calls Kansas City back again, but this time the coppers are no help at all. They delve deeply into their records, but do not find that Bushel ever pals around with two guys who answer the general description of bulky shoulders or blonde.

As a matter of fact, they do not even have anyone like this pair on the wanted list.

"All right," says the homicide man, "so they get together in some other place. You discover Bushel is out of Kansas City, I don't know how, but tell me where these other dudes hail from. It is very important that we lay hands on them at once."

"I realize this quite well," admits Baldy, "but sometimes even Sherlock Holmes has to do a bit of legwork. I have another thought cooking. Once it comes to a boil, I will pass the results on to you."

Thereupon he takes himself off to the hostelry where Julie Hart makes her abode, and gives out with the happy news of Harry Bushel's demise.

"You no longer have anything to fear," he says, "If you pass out the names of Harry's pals we get the whole matter straightened out, and your name

does not even appear in the matter."

"But, I do not know them," Julie protests. "I meet Harry a number of times in KC with Kitty Kilduff, but I never see the other two before we observe them in the Cafe Moderne."

"You are sure you do not hold out on me?"

"Absolutely. I have nothing to be afraid of now. The blond and the big shouldered guy do not know me. Besides, if they kill Bushel, it is a diamond bracelet to a bag of pecans that they get out of town as fast as they can. It is likely that Bushel picks them up in Chi or San Loo, or some other place. Anyway, I cross my heart I do not know them."

Mr. Simmons rubs his bald pate. "Under no circumstances do I admit this to Captain Bellamy," he says, "because it makes a bum out of my observation and deduction theory, particularly the observation part. However, it sticks in my mind that I hear one of them called by a nickname. For the life of me I am unable to recall what it is."

"Oh, that!" exclaims Julie.

"Yes, that. Do you remember?"

"Of course. You keep telling me to keep my eyes and ears open, and not forget things. Harry calls the big fellow 'Hippo'!"

Baldy snaps his fingers.

"That's it. You're a sweet gal, Julie, and a smart one." He reaches for the phone, and calls homicide.

"All I am able to report at the moment," he says, "is that the fellow who is built like a wrestler is known as 'Hippo.' I do not know where he hails from, but maybe if you contact the FBI, John Edgar Hoover's boys are able to give you a rundown. It is reasonable to believe that the Feds have something on him."

"Hippo, eh? It is an unusual monicker, and may be a lead. For an amateur, you come up with the darnedest stuff. If you run across this Hippo in your wanderings just give me a fast call."

"You think I won't?" asks Baldy Simmons.

That same evening Baldy goes to the Mocambo to wait around for Julie, because he is not quite as sure as she is that all danger to her goes by the board.

While he is sitting there, O'Hara, the blond man with the pale eyes, who helps holdup the Cafe Moderne, is on his way in the same direction. Though it is a warmish evening, O'Hara feels cold sweat on his palms and forehead. Having killed Harry Bushel, and made off with the undivided thirty grand, he has an idea what Hippo Smyle does, if Hippo catches up with him.

HIPPO likes to inflict pain, and has no inhibitions about killing anyone the hard way. O'hara is very sensitive about pain, when it concerns him. He does not bother about the police, because he figures there is no way for them to tie him in with either job. O'Hara has no record, and not having been in the service even his fingerprints are not on file.

He teams up with Bushel in St. Joseph, Mo., and the St. Joseph cops think him clean as a whistle. All he has to worry about is Hippo, who must read the papers by this time, and figure who knocks the boss off. O'Hara is able to get away with the killing easily, because the three pals stay in different hotels, and do not appear together publicly.

However, there is really nothing to worry about, even with Hippo, because O'Hara has a scheme all worked out; a scheme that does not miss under any combination of circumstances. He goes into the Mocambo, sits down at a table, and orders a Scotch and soda.

The spotlight scissors the dance floor from the rest of the room. Beyond its radiance patrons are vague gray shapes, jewel tipped with glowing ends of cigarettes. O'Hara smells the chorus before it dances out, the chorus smell of perfume and powder and raspberry lipstick. The girls wear only brassieres, the briefest of panties, and open work

slippers that make the most of red lacquered toenails.

The chorus retreats to a ruler-straight line at the rear of the floor. The band strikes a fanfare. Out dances a tall and lovely girl, hair as dark as midnight in the desert, and a figure to make a man's heart stop. A moment before the chorus girls seem pretty and desirable. Now, in contrast with this beauty, they now are insipid.

That's the dame, O'Hara thinks, the one Bushel talks to in the Moderne. What a dish. The guy who does not go for that is nuts or something.

He watches the gorgeous slim legs, the hip slide with shoulders thrown back, presenting the profile of her body. For a moment he is sorry for what it is necessary to do before the night is over. However, he shakes off that moment of sentiment. Thirty thousand dollars and his own safety are more important than any girl in the world—no matter how pretty she happens to be.

Baldy Simmons is sitting in Julie's dressing room, waiting for her to finish the last show. So far he has not been notified by Captain Bellamy if Hippo is identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but he has a pleasantly warm feeling this is exactly what happens. In the meantime he sticks around to play bodyguard for Julie, which is a task any male in the world accepts with yips of joy.

Mr. Simmons is reading *Variety* to kill time until the last show is over when the door opens. The band is just starting Julie's last number, so Baldy looks up in surprise. There in the doorway is the blond man who is with Bushel in the Cafe Moderne holdup and killing.

Old nude noggin decides to play it straight and pretend not to recognize the fellow. So, he nods, says, "Hello," and goes on with his reading.

O'HARA shuts the door, and half slips a pistol out of a side pocket to make the situation clear.

"No squawks," he says. "You remem-

ber me, and I remember you. If I am caught the coppers scrag me for killing the guard, so it does not matter if I also admit I lay Harry Bushel among the nasturtiums."

"I see what you mean," agrees Baldy. He also sees it is very unlikely this blond lad leaves either Baldy Simmons or Miss Julie Hart alive when he goes on his not so merry way. But, what he is doing here now is really something of a puzzler, too.

I am always telling Captain Bellamy, Baldy thinks, that part of the Sherlock Holmes theory is that anybody gets out of a jam if he uses his brain in the right and proper way. This is as good a time as any to prove it. Our friend here obviously has some dreary plans made for Julie and me. If I miss out, the newspapers have a couple more murders to yawn about.

"I beg you pardon," he says, "but I do not get the name."

"The name is O'Hara, but you are not around to remember it, so do not break your neck with politeness."

"Well," says Baldy, "you may as well sit down. Julie still has a couple minutes left of her number, and I do not assume you come to her dressing room to see me."

O'Hara accepts the invitation, keeping his hand on the butt of his gun. He just waits, kind of glum and saying nothing until Julie comes in. She wears her scanty stage costume, and is sweating and a little out of breath from her dance.

Her eyes grow large, for she recognizes him just as Mr. Simmons does.

"Shut the door," O'Hara says. He is making no attempt to hide his pistol. Promptly, Miss Hart does as he requests. Then she takes a kimono off the hook, and covers her loveliness.

"What do you want?" Julie asks.

Still holding the gun, O'Hara slips a cigarette out of the pack, tucks it into his mouth, snaps a match on a fingernail and puffs hungrily.

"I want you to do me a favor. I have

an idea, and you are the one to make it work."

Now we find out what this lad is up to, Baldy thinks, and then it devolves upon me to outguess him. This is what Sherlock Holmes does to Prof. Moriarity and other wise Johns, so it is not fair to let my hero down. Besides, to be even more practical, I am not yet ready to leave this world of tears, and am quite sure Julie agrees with me on this point.

"What is it?" asks Miss Hart.

"Oh, it is very simple," O'Hara goes on. "You know I am in on the deal at the Cafe Moderne, so I may as well admit I knock off Harry Bushel, and take all the dough myself. Naturally our other pal, Hippo Smyle, is gunning for me, and it is necessary to cut him down before he does the same for me."

"Your reasoning is sound," agrees Baldy, "but where do we fit into such a scheme?"

It is apparent that O'Hara is very pleased with himself, quite blown up with pride at having figured something so well. He smiles, and spins the gun on his index finger.

"It is very simple," he says. "Within half an hour this trap is closed tighter than an old-time speakeasy. Hippo is staying at the Hotel Majestic. Julie must call him, and say I am coming here. What happens? Hippo arrives on the double, and I gun him down before he has a chance to shoot me. Cute, eh?"

And, even cuter, Mr. Simmons thinks, is that after you finish Hippo, you also knock off Julie and me to get rid of witnesses. If we refuse to call Hippo, the problem is complicated for O'Hara, but this does nothing to help us, for what good is the deal if we are not around to see what happens?

"Yes, it is an excellent idea," Baldy agrees. "But there are several points that seem to be on the foggy side. What makes you think the Hippopotamus does not smell a rat, and refuses to answer such a summons?"

"Because Bushel keeps saying Julie Hart is the only person in the Cafe

Moderne who recognizes him, and as soon as he gets a few minutes to himself he knocks her off. Naturally, Hippo Smyle figures I go along with this idea, and take over the job myself. It is certainly a thought that appeals to him."

"Is he not likely to ask how Miss Hart gets his telephone number, assuming no one is supposed to know where he hides out?"

O'Hara grins. "This, of course, is what occurs to the average intelligent person. However, Hippo is the most stupid man I ever meet, all muscle and no mind. He is so happy to get a cut at me that he rushes over here pell mell without giving thought to anything else in all the world. On this premise I am willing to bet the entire thirty thousand I grab from Bushel as he lies still, white and not too beautiful on the floor."

Mr. Simmons shrugs. "You seem to have the answers. Now, there is just one more question, if you do not mind. How do you know Hippo is at the hotel, and not gum-shoeing around town on a still hunt for you?"

"There is such a possibility," O'Hara admits, "but Hippo is more likely to have someone else do the hunting for him, being a very lazy person and having bad feet, anyway. If he is not in at first, we call again. Go ahead, Julie."

THE girl looks at Baldy with frightened eyes, and he nods reassuringly. "What's the number of the Majestic?" she asks.

"Now, how would I know the number?" O'Hara snorts. "There is a telephone book at your elbow. Look it up."

"It is completely unnecessary," says Baldy. "You may be new in town, but I live here twenty-five years. The number of the Majestic is Saxony 3-9342."

Julie reaches across the litter of bottles and boxes on her dressing table, and pulls the telephone toward her. Her nice knees, visible in an opening of the kimono, are trembling. She is frightened half to death, and has reason to be. Baldy leans forward, watching, every

nerve in him tight as a fiddle string.

"Saxony 3-9342, the Majestic Hotel?" asks Miss Hart. "Hippo Smyle, please." There is a slight pause. Then: "This is Julie Hart at the Mocambo. You know, the girl Harry Bushel talks to at the Mocambo. The blond fellow you are with that night is in the club, and says he is coming back to see me. After what I read in the papers about Harry, I am scared. You will come, Hippo? Thank you."

She hangs up. O'Hara pats his hands together in applause.

"You waste your time dancing, baby," he says. "You play that part like Ingrid Bergman."

"All right. Now, do I get dressed and go?"

O'Hara's pale blue eyes goggle.

"Go? Are you batty? Go where? To the police? Act your age, honey? You go nowhere now, or afterward."

"You mean to kill us?"

"Of course, I mean to kill you. However, take it easy. You still have a half hour. It takes Hippo that long to get here from uptown."

Julie turns to the dressing table, and begins to clean the stage makeup off her face.

"Please excuse me," she says. "I do not wish even the police to see me looking all made up like this when they find my body."

"What a body it is, too," the killer murmurs. "I am a most unhappy guy when the time comes to put a bullet in you and your fat friend here."

Julie pays no attention to this, and goes on with the job of remaking her face. As the big moment comes closer, O'Hara gets a little nervous. He sits with his back to the door, watching both Baldy and the girl at the dressing table. He is not concerned about the door at the moment, because it is impossible for Hippo to arrive for some time yet.

Baldy begins to see the door inch open quietly and slowly. So, he begins to talk.

"You hear Bushel says Julie knows

how to keep her mouth shut. So do I. Why give us a bad time of it? We will never do anything to hurt you."

"Quite true," agrees O'Hara, "and you never get the chance. I am sorry, but even you are compelled to admit there is no other way."

By this time the door is half open. Baldy is afraid even to glance in that direction for fear the blond man suspects. Then, suddenly, the portal is flung wide, and in leaps Captain Pete Bellamy, who laces a strangle hold around O'Hara's neck.

Behind the captain come a couple of plain clothes men, who whip handcuffs on the killer, before he realizes what happens.

"Nice work," says Mr. Simmons, "What goes with Hippo?"

"Four squad cars move in as soon as I get the telephone message. No doubt they have the big bum tied up like a sackful of oats."

BELLAMY gets on the telephone himself, and finds that the murderous Mr. Smyle is already gaffed. O'Hara keeps looking at Baldy, and shaking his head.

"I do not know how to figure this out," he mutters.

"Mr. Simmons gets on Bushel's trail through the mention of Kitty Kilduff's name," the captain says.

"Look, copper," snaps O'Hara, "I do not care how this baldheaded chump gets wise to Bushel. What I wish to know is how you show up when all this dame does is call Hippo."

"You tell him, Baldy," says Bellamy.

"It is quite simple," says Mr. Simmons. "Since you are new to the town, O'Hara, you do not realize Saxony 3-9342 is the number for Homicide and not the Majestic Hotel. So, Julie is able to tell the whole story to Captain Bellamy without arousing your suspicions. All I worry about is whether she fumbles her assignment."

Miss Hart now stands up.

"If you gentlemen," she says, "are kind enough to take this bum out of here, I get dressed and go on my way. There is no chance of my fouling up the detail, Baldy, I know Saxony 3-9342 is not the number of the Majestic Hotel, because I lived there once, myself. So, I figure it is someone you want tipped off to what is happening. When I hear Captain Bellamy's voice I know everything is all right. Yes, sir," says Julie Hart, "that Sherlock Holmes is a very smart guy, indeed."



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE TIME WILL COME

A Novelet of Macabre Mystery

By **FRANCES BECK**

PACKED WITH SUSPENSE, SHOCKS AND SURPRISES!

A Nice Night for MURDER

A harbor police officer braves chopping whitecaps in a wind-lashed sea to board a sinking yacht stalked by grisly death!



By
**STEWART
STERLING**

CHAPTER I RADIO WARNING

CRISPLY the voice came over the loud speaker:

"Attention Vigilant: Tug *Helen Maginn*, towing barges westbound, reports some small craft adrift and awash five hundred yards north northeast City Island Point, seven-fifty P.M. That is all!"

"That is all," Lieutenant Steve Koski

repeated silently, snapping the toggle on the two-way from *Listen to Talk*. Just "some small craft" adrift in boiling whitecaps on a night so wind-lashed even the cross-bay ferries were taking a terrific beating!

Maybe some late-season eel-fisherman overturned in the ugly channel

Koski seized the engineer's left wrist, stooped and pivoted



A STEVE KOSKI NOVELET

chop. Or perhaps only a reckless kid whose leaky scow got swamped in the tide rip. Nothing really important, the dispatcher's tone had indicated. No hot headline police stuff, like a Broadway theatre stickup or a Third Avenue bar battle!

Koski was burning up at the casual

way the radio room at headquarters handled such relay calls. As if it were only the big crimes—and as far as the Harbor Precinct was concerned—only the big seagoing ships that mattered. The particular small craft referred to in the message might not have looked like much to that tugboat captain, high

and dry in his pilot house. But it would have been pretty important to anybody who happened to be on the small craft when it went down. In Koski's book, any boat was as big as the people on board, and human lives were all the same size.

Of course this might be a false alarm. Harbor Squad patrols were used to shagging after floating fruit crates or waterlogged mattresses somebody'd mistaken for drifting boats. But this was a tough time to be doing it.

It was his own dumb fault he was out here at all, in weather a walrus would avoid if he could, Koski reminded himself. He could have accepted that proffered promotion. He'd now be sitting pretty in a padded desk-chair instead of trying to keep his footing on a desk that buckled like a sunfishing bronc.

But he always had liked saltwater work better than paper work. Besides, the Commissioner's offer of a captain's gold badge, instead of a lieutenant's silver one, hadn't mentioned what would happen to Sergeant Mulcahey. It would take more than a pay raise to break up the roughest, toughest two-man crew on New York harbor's six hundred miles of waterfront.

He leaned close to the mike. "Patrol Nine, checking," he said—and swung the wheel to starboard.

IN THE dim glow from the binnacle his face had the weather-chiseled quality of a stone gargoye, accustomed to the worst that wind and water could offer. His close-cropped hair, beneath his uniform cap, might have been cut from the frayed ends of a new hawser. "Better get your nose wet, Sarge."

The bulking shadow beside him stirred resentfully. "Would you so kindly explain why some people get all the breaks, Steve?" Sergeant Joe Mulcahey tucked a towel inside the collar of his slicker. "Only five minutes and we'd be off duty. Now we got to play Ring-Around-the-Rosy with that rot-

ten channel chop just to salvage a row-boat for some rich poop who is probly sittin' aboard this palatial yacht right this minute, a highball in one hand an' a choice chick in the other."

"You've got more beefs than a Chicago packing house," Koski squinted at the amber beads strung across the slim neck of the distant Point; the riding lights of schooners, yawls and power cruisers at the Neptune Yacht Club. "It costs these upper-bracket boys at least a hundred clams per day to spend their time on the Sound; you get paid for doing the same."

Mulcahey stepped out into the spray; his round face glistened like a wet tomato in the *Vigilant's* running light:

"Call this doin' the same thing? Gettin' soaked to the shorts? Imibin' sea-water instead of bonded likker? Putting in overtime with no extra pay on account some dumb clunk forgets to secure his dinghy?"

"Your crystal ball must have spray shields, if you can see a dinghy adrift at this distance."

"What I can see is I am going to have to stand up my doll tonight—whilst we go chasin' after a wild goose."

"A nice night for geese, Sarge."

"You ask me, 'tis a nice night for homicide. That I wouldn't mind so much. Putting in overtime—if we was after a floater, say, or grappling for some stool-pigeon who took a dive with his feet in a concrete block. But this huntin' after a boat that's gone adrift—that's for children."

Koski switched on the searchlight, pointed the long finger of the light across the churning froth of the channel, let it feel its way along the jagged rocks of the windward shore. "I hope there were no kids in that, Sarge. See her, beyond those pilings?"

The white finger touched a spot of pale blue, bobbing in the lashing surf between barnacled boulders.

"Eyes like a goonie you have, Steve. That'll be one of them plastic beauties they advertise as non-sinkable."

"She's not exactly sunk." Koski slowed the hundred and eighty horses beneath the *Vigilant's* motor-hatch. "Sure stove-in, though."

Mulcahey ducked a dollop of water sloshing over the coaming. "I take it back about other people getting the breaks. We won't be held up, at all, at all. My doll will not bawl me out for standing her up, either. We just short-wave our report."

"Report my stern." Koski threw the clutch to neutral. "We're going in after her."

"'Twill make kindling of us, Steve! Thrashing around in those rocks! There's no more'n two feet of water!"

"It'll be enough. Lash a grappling iron to a life-ring. Let the wind run it in." Koski gauged the sweep of the tide, the force of the gale. "I'm curious to know how a dink from the club managed to drift in there. Current ought to have carried it out in the Sound if it broke loose from any of the yachts."

"Maybe 'tis second sight you have an' not gull-eyes, at all. Always imaginin' some fiddoodling. The dinghy prob'ly went ashore at high tide." The sergeant squatted by the transom with a three-pronged hook and life preserver.

"Tug reported her adrift ten minutes ago," Koski reminded him. "Pay your line out fast."

HHE MANEUVERED the thirty-footer like a jockey coming through by the rail at the head of the stretch. The life-ring hit the water, was driven to leeward as if it was under power.

The ring bumped the bobbing blue hull. The hook took hold. Mulcahey hauled in the dinghy.

Koski helped the sergeant empty the tiny egg-shelled craft, hoist it into the cockpit.

"*Sea-Pup!*" Mulcahey read the lettering on the stern. "The names some nit-wits give boats!"

"Yair. This pup got hurt, Joe." Koski knelt with his trouble-light.

"Don't look like those holes come from

bein' smashed on rocks, for a fact." The sergeant scowled. "More as if they were stove in with a boat hook." He pointed to inch-wide wounds in the shiny plastic hull.

"What would you say made *that?*" Koski held the trouble-lamp close to the white nylon rope which ran around the dinghy's gunwale.

Mulcahey gawked at the blob of crimson smearing the rope where it coiled into a knot just above the lettering: *Pup*. "For a guess and without no tests from the Broome Street lab boys, I would say that was prob'ly not pooch blood. Indeed it's not second sight you've got, either. 'Tis a super-human sense of smell. To sniff out somethin' fishy about this rowboat!"

"Right sizeable fish." Koski tapped one of the oarlocks where red glinted from the bronze plate. "Or else whoever was rowing was hurt bad."

He peered across the boiling rip toward the opposite shore. "If she was sunk this side, no telling where she came from. But if she got those holes in her bottom across the channel, that's about where she started her drift." He pointed.

"No yachts over there," Mulcahey said. "Nothin' except Allied Diesel Works. Hulburt's sand and gravel dock. And—the Beacon Light."

Koski went forward, got the police boat underway. "Some of the hands off the club yachts spent their off-time in the Beacon, don't they?"

"Spend their pay, too." Mulcahey nodded. "Would it be your notion one of the engineers or stewards got a little schwocked, maybe?"

"Haven't any notion." Koski sent the *Vigilant* smashing into the chop with a bone in her teeth and feathers of spray streaming from her pilot house. "All I've got is a dink somebody tried to sink. Plus a glob of blood somebody might have figured would wash off if the boat did sink. I don't know what it adds up to. It doesn't look like the score of a tiddlywinks game."

CHAPTER II

BARROOM-FIGHT



ABRUPTLY the bedlam in the Beacon died to a hush as Koski stalked in, alone.

The noisy group at the far end of the bar became abruptly silent. A belligerent argument between a drunken youth in dungarees and a stringy blonde in a low-cut dress, broke off unfinished. The off-key yowling of an alcoholic quartette, in a booth near the door, trailed away in discord. Even the juke, wailing the final notes of "Drop Dead," became quiet. Everybody eyed the lieutenant's cap.

Koski's long slicker said "cop." The cap said "Harbor Squad." Ordinary patrolmen caused no stir along the waterfront. Francy's customers had learned, through hard experience, to respect men of the Harbor Precinct. Men wearing that cap seldom interfered in mere bar-room brawls.

Bull-necked, hog-jowled Francy himself broke the spell.

He wiped his hands on a dirty apron, sidled along the bar, mopping up beer slop with a filthy rag.

"Crummy night, Lieutenant." His voice held no welcome. Uniforms were bad for trade.

"Little breezy, yair." Koski gave the customers the once-over. They glared back.

He went to the bar. "Know who belongs to a yacht called *Sea-Pup*?"

He directed the question to Francy, kept his eyes on the back-bar.

The proprietor shook his head. "Any you scuts know a craft called *Sea-Pup*?"

A rumble of negatives answered him. But in the mirror Koski saw heads down at the end of the bar swivel toward a keg-chested banty with long arms and a close-shaven bullet-head. He glowered pugnaciously at Koski's back.

"What goes, Francy! You op'ratin' without a license or somep'n? Just be-

cause a John Law crashes the joint, we all got to hold our breaths?! Set 'em up in the same alley!"

Francy frowned uneasily. "Comin' right up, Buzz. Two Jamaick, one sloe, one rye, four lights."

Koski murmured: "Make mine Scotch and tap."

Swiftly the proprietor slapped a whisky glass in front of him. "Any special brand, Lieutenant?"

The barrel-bodied character hammered the bar with his fist.

"Look at that muckin' sign over yer cash register, Francy! Says *Thirst Come, Thirst Served*, don't it? Well, I got my order in first and my friends ain't takin' no back seat for any fuddlin' badge!"

"Take it easy," Francy warned, "and you'll get it constant, Buzz. I'm servin' one on th' house."

Buzz banged the bar with the flat of his palm. Beer glasses jumped. "Rush them drinks, hear me? I ain't waitin' on any clabber-brain copperoo!"

Koski strode down the length of the bar.

The group around moved aside to let the Harbor Precinct man pass, shouldered in behind him as he came close to the cocky man with the shaven skull.

Koski kept his voice casual: "Full of fizz and vinegar tonight, aren't you, bud?"

Buzz stuck out his jaw; fumbled for an empty beer glass on the bar. "I'm mindin' my own business and buyin' a few drinks for my pals, and I don't want no trouble from any bulldozin' flatfoot! Hear?"

"Spendin' free and easy, aren't you?" Koski cut in. "Hit the jackpot, somewhere?"

Buzz's right hand dug into the pocket of his soiled ducks, came up with a thick roll. "My own dough! You any right to tell me how to spend it?"

"Depends on how you got it." Koski watched the beer glass dangling at the edge of the bar. He spoke mildly to Francy, over the shoulders of Buzz's

companions. "I'll try some of that pinch bottle."

Buzz stuck out his lower lip. His eyebrows, rust-colored and unshaven, met scowling above the bridge of a flattened nose. "I don't earn my jack stickin' my snoot into other folks' business, like some mugs aroun' here!"

KOSKI grabbed the man's Melton jacket at the top button. He was in too close to use his gun. He didn't like to go for his automatic unless it was necessary. It didn't seem necessary at the moment.

He jerked Buzz toward him, crowding him against the bar. "Where do you work, Buster?"

Buzz was caught with his right hand stuffing the money back in his pants. His left elbow was jammed against the bar. He wrenched around, to free it.

"I'm an engineer. Leggo!"

"What ship?" Koski ignored the angry undercurrent of mutterings behind him.

"No ship. Ain't workin' now." Buzz got his right fist free, swung it.

Koski blocked the blow with his elbow. "Just paid off tonight, hah? Where was your last job? Aboard the *Sea Pup*?"

Buzz snarled: "I never hear of no yacht with that name. You show me any yacht with that name around the Island, I'll buy you enough Scotch to swim in!" He levered his left arm loose, smashed the beer glass on the bar.

Francy yelled: "Stow that stuff, Buzz!" He banged the pinchbottle in front of Koski.

Buzz jabbed the jagged glass at Koski's eyes.

The Harbor Squad man swept the whisky bottle off the bar with his right hand, sent it flying. It caught Buzz in the teeth, threw him off balance for a second. Koski seized the engineer's left wrist, stooping, pivoting!

The wrist came up over his shoulder. So did Buzz, slashing downward in mid-air with the deadly glass.

Lancing pain bit into Koski's forearm as Buzz did a no-hands cartwheel up over the bar into the bottles ranged against the mirror.

Before Buzz fell on his head in a mess of busted glass, Koski was going up and over in a one-hand vault.

He landed heavily on Buzz. The engineer was out cold. He lay with his mouth open, his eyes glazed.

Koski wound his fingers in the other's collar. "Anybody wants a helping of the same potatoes—I'll meet him up at the end of the bar." He dragged Buzz along past Francy who kept hollering:

"Who'll pay for the damage? Who'll pay the damage?"

Koski bent, felt in Buzz's pockets.

"Here." He peeled two twenties off the fat roll. "Take your breakage out of this. He'll need the rest for cigarette money, where he's going."

When Koski got his prisoner back to the *Vigilant*, Sergeant Mulcahey was working in the cockpit. Mulcahey called:

"Love of cheeses, what you got there, Steve?"

Koski clumped down to the float. "Buzzsaw with a few teeth missing." He dumped the unconscious engineer off his shoulder to the coaming. "Maybe we can get him to humming again if we work him over a little."

The sergeant laid Buzz on the engine hatch. "Are you sure it would not be better if a medico did the work? This guy looks in very poor shape."

"Cut his puss diving into a mirror. Broke a couple of choppers when he bounced off the edge of the sink."

"Either he is a very dumb dodo or else he does not know your rep at that Pier Six stuff, Steve. Or maybe he has enough booze aboard to make him a trifle reckless?"

"He was flying higher than a B-Thirty-Six when I brought him down, Sarge. Bring that ammonia."

"'Twill be more'n smelling salts you'll need to patch up that tear in your own slicker—and what's under it."

Koski felt of his arm. "Stings a bit.

Spilled some hooch on it. Be all right. Patch it with tape. Rub that cork on his smeller."

THE sergeant shook the ammonia bottle, touched the rubber to the engineer's nostrils. Buzz didn't stir.

"Daub iodine on his cuts, sarge. That ought to do it." Koski went through Buzz's pockets.

Sailor's case-knife, razor-sharp; pack of blood-soggy cigarettes; book of matches from Sloppy Joe's, Avenida Santiago, Habana; another from Jack Dempsey's Restaurant, New York. Rubber tobacco pouch; no tobacco but a union card made out to Benjamin F. Cotlett, Norfolk, Va., and a folded picture postcard addressed to Buzz Cotlett, c/o Ketch *Sea-Dog*, Porto Abrillo, Cuba.

That was all except for a trick magnifying glass that showed an enlargement of a naked girl—and sixty-four cents in coin.

Mulcahey poked the glass applicator at a corner of the engineer's blood-caked mouth.

Buzz moaned. He cursed thickly, opened his eyes.

"My shoulder! You pulled my shoulder outa joint."

"You'll have more than a shoulder to worry about," Koski said.

"Yah! You caught me off guard with that Commando trick. I should have give it to you right off the bat." Buzz fumbled at his teeth.

Koski hunkered down beside him. "Never heard of the *Sea-Pup*, hah?"

"Didn't say that," Buzz twisted his head to look at the dinghy lying against the transom. "No yacht of that name, I said."

"How about the *Sea-Dog*? With a *Sea-Pup* tagging along behind?"

"So all right, you got me." The engineer grimaced, propping himself on one elbow. "So you're gonna beat the tail off me, if I don't talk. Okay, I'll talk. What you want me to say?"

"You worked on the ketch? How long?"

"Six, seven months."

"Who's the owner?"

"Maury Perris. Do I get to smoke? Or you gonna third me?"

Koski stuck a cigarette in Cotlett's mouth, lit it. "Sorry if this isn't your brand."

Buzz squinted balefully. "What the devil! It's tobacco."

"Yair." The lieutenant rubbed his chin. "This Perris. He the big bustle and leg man?"

"That's him. Duke of Dames, they call him on Broadway." Buzz inhaled, coughed, retched.

Mulcahey helped him to the cockpit coaming.

Koski wondered if he was handling this thing right. The wise heads down at Harbor Precinct headquarters would probably have told him the way to handle anything connected with Maury Perris was with gloves on. Koski reflected that it was too bad he'd left his gloves at home.

Perris, the wonder-boy of Neon Alley; the muscial comedy maestro who'd rocketed into the public eye with "Undress Parade"; who had his face in more newsreels and on more television sets than the President—always against a backdrop of what his press agent called the "Perris Lovelies."

Mysterious Maury, the gossip papers dubbed him. Nobody knew where he'd come from, how he got his money. Nobody knew whether he had the millions he claimed or was merely ballyhooing a bluff into a fortune. Young, good-looking, glib, smooth as a silk-stockinged leg—Mysterious Maury.

Koski said to his prisoner, "Must have been a soft touch, working for a boss like that, Cotlett. When did you quit?"

"Tonight." The face with the flattened nose was shiny with sweat; the voice was sullen instead of truculent. "I didn't quit, either. He paid me off, with a bonus on account of it's late in the season to get another job on a pleasure craft."

"Why'd he fire you?"

Buzz spat out blood. "Well, you see, it's like this: Mr. Perris wasn't on the *Sea-Dog* much. Too busy running his show biz, I guess. Like you say, it was a cincheroo job. We'd be on the club mooring a couple weeks. Then we'd run down to Cuba with some movie tycoons, hit the high spots in Havana, run back up here and play sitting duck another couple weeks.

"Three of us did the work. Jeff Vaughn, he's the cap; a smart sailorman, Jeff is. Frank Kaalohti, he's cookee an' steward, from Honolulu. Frank's all right, too. And me. All we got to do, most the time, is to be nice to Mrs. Perris. And *that ain't bad!*"

KOSKI nodded to keep the faucet flowing. "Wife stayed on board most of the time, alone?"

Buzz's fingers hid his mouth. "Well, you see, she wasn't exactly alone, most of the time. There's this sidekick of the boss, Mr. Belton. He sort of hung around practically all the while the boss was away. Very cuddly with Mrs. Perris, when he thinks nobody is lookin' or listenin'."

Mulcahey grunted: "Does Maury Peris know what goes, behind his back?"

"Well, no. That's what got Mr. Perris sore tonight, see. Belton is on board with Mrs. Perris; they aren't expectin' the Duke until tomorrow night. I'm in the clubhouse ferryin' out a bucket of ice-cubes—we run short—and boom! I run smack into the boss, luggin' his suitcase.

"I guess I looked surprised. Or maybe he's wise to the setup, because right off he wants to know who's on board his ketch. I can't duck it, because for sure he's going out there and see for himself. So I tell him."

Koski stripped off his slicker, got busy with adhesive. The gash in his arm was deep. It probably needed stitching. But it could wait; he had more urgent matters to attend to. "Was Belton's being aboard news to your boss?"

The engineer's eyes narrowed: "How

would I know? All I know is, Perris got redhot. Said he'd fix Belton's wagon so it wouldn't squeak any more. Wanted me to row him right out. I says 'Whyn't you wait till the club launch gets back to the float and go out on that, Mr. Perris? You'll get drenched, in the *Sea-Pup*, so much spray. Your suitcase'll get soaked.'

"Well, that tore it, see? He accuses me of bein' in with 'em—of wanting to get out to the *Dog* ahead of him and tip 'em off. He hauls out a roll of bills and asks me how much I got comin'. He adds some extra to it and gives me walkin' papers then and there. Wouldn't even let me go back to the ketch for my stuff. Said he'd ship it to me.

"Then he rows out to the *Sea-Dog* by himself. I come up to the avenue, walk down to the Beacon. And that's all."

"All," Koski said, "except why you had enough moola to choke a whale, when you wouldn't have that much coming to you if you'd drawn no pay since you wore diapers. Why you were so eager to pick a scrap with me when I mentioned the *Sea-Pup*. Why has the dink got blood all over it? And who tried to sink it by punching holes in it?"

Buzz Cotlett stared. "So! He did kill them, after all? I never thought he really meant it. Honest truth, I didn't think so. He don't seem like that kind of a mug at all!"

Koski punched the starter button.

"Let's go see what kind he is, hah?"

CHAPTER III

DISTRACTED WIFE



IN the last two hours the wind had increased. Despite Mulcahey's careful handling, the *Vigilant* bucked like a rodeo bronc.

Buzz sprawled in the cockpit, his back against the *Sea-Pup*, his head held between his hands. Koski studied the listing in Lloyds Register of Yachts:

SEA-DOG, auxiliary diesel ketch, built by Nevins, 1938. L. 55 ft. B. 14 ft. D. 4 ft. 10 in. Owner, Sydna Perris, Hampton Roads, Va. Registered vessel 21 tons, Colon, Rep. Panama, 1948.

Well, it wasn't unusual for a man to transfer ownership of his yacht to his wife, Koski told himself. But that Panamanian registry; that was a horse of another collar.

Why would a Broadway personality, a member of the exclusive Neptune Club, prefer to fly the flag of the tiny canal republic instead of his own country's ensign?

Then, why had the *Sea-Dog* come to New York in September, after that Havana cruise? Most pleasure craft, about this time, were heading south for Florida waters.

"Which mooring's the ketch on?" asked Mulcahey.

"Last one," Buzz spoke as if he had a mouthful of hot spaghetti. "End of the line. Out south."

Koski said: "What's with this Belton boy?"

The engineer looked up. "A skunk-ino. Useta be a professional wrestler. Big-a da muscle. Likes to pose around in swim trunks. I think he wears a chest wig."

"What's he work at, nowadays?"

Buzz held out one hand, palm up. "Mrs. Perris, mostly. He eats for free on the *Sea-Dog*. He wouldn't spend a nickel to see an earthquake. Frank says he's a nixy-never for tips."

The patrol boat swung inside moored yachts, pitching uneasily on their buoys. Only a small sloop and one bridge-decked sport-fisherman showed lights below. Three blue bulbs on the club mast glowed ghostlike a hundred feet to leeward.

The *Sea-Dog* was dark, except for the pale spark of her riding light.

Mulcahey slanted in toward her starboard quarter. "Give 'em a hail, Steve?"

"No," Koski ordered. "Run alongside."

The *Vigilant* rubbed her black nose against the ketch's flank.

Koski went up on the foredeck with a hand torch.

"Hold her, Sarge."

He stepped across to the *Sea-Dog's* cockpit. "Anybody aboard?"

No answer. But the companionway was open. Below the deck shone a dim radiance.

Queer way to leave a yacht. Cabin unlocked. All hands ashore.

Koski went down.

A galley. Unwashed dishes. Main cabin. Dirty dishes on the gimbal-swung table. Cigarette smoke. And a queer, sweetly sickening smell that was an offense to the nostrils.

On the carpeted floor, beside one of the built-in bunks, was the torn coat of a girl's pajamas. Gauzy, pink silk. Collar ripped. Buttons off. And one red, high-heeled slipper.

The glow came from a stateroom, forward on the port side. It hadn't been visible at the angle from which the *Vigilant* approached.

Koski moved warily toward it. From behind the door, someone screamed:

"No, no, no, Maury! Don't! PLEASE, MAURY! ! !"

She crouched against the head of a big, double bed. All she had on was the pajama pants to match the torn jacket, but she hugged a pillow tightly in front of her.

HER dark eyes bulged with terror. A sleek mane of chestnut hair fell tousled across her face. Her lips made a scarlet O in her bronze-tanned face.

Koski looked at the disorder of feminine clothes on the chair at the end of the bed. "Expecting your husband, Mrs. Perris?"

She nodded dumbly. Then she whispered. "Who are you?"

"Police. Harbor Patrol. Koski, Lieutenant. Where's Perris?"

"He—went to the club." The fear remained etched on her face. "Has anything bad—happened?"

"You tell me." He heard a dull thump,

as if a rowboat bumped the hull.

"Maury's out of his mind!" She tossed her head to get the hair away from her eyes. "He came aboard while I was asleep. Ham was here. I heard a terrific battle in the cabin. Maury was beating Ham's brains out with a pistol. I tried to stop my husband. He came at me like a maniac, ripped my pajamas, called me all kinds of vile names, struck me. That's all I remember—until I came to a minute ago. I thought he was coming back to kill me too."

The muffled thumping sounded once more. It wasn't from the hull, Koski decided. "Ham? The wrestler boy?"

"Yes." She caught her lower lip between her teeth. "My husband accused me of—two-timing him."

"No-o-o!" Koski was sardonic. "Where's your crew?"

"The engineer went ashore. Aren't the others here?" She closed her eyes, leaned against the bed as if she was about to keel over.

"Get some duds on." Koski stepped out of the stateroom, listening. The bumping came from the crew's quarters, up in the bow. "Make it fast." He let his flash-beam precede him.

The forecabin was a cramped space with low headroom. In one of the pipe-berths lay a trussed-up giant with blood on his forehead and a sock in his mouth. He wore blue corduroys, a blue jersey, sneakers. His ankles were tied to the pipe-frame of the berth with canvas sail-stops. He was thumping his skull against the bulkhead. Koski cut the gag binding, jerked out the sock.

Belton let out a croak: "Did you get the dirty buzzard? Where is he?"

The lieutenant used his knife on the canvas strips around Belton's wrists. Then he used the strips to wipe blood off the wrestler's forehead. Belton put up his hands, pushed Koski away.

"Never mind. I'll be all right."

Koski pursed his lips. "Think so?"

The big man scowled. "I wouldn't have been if you hadn't come aboard before that bloodthirsty buzzard got back.

He nearly killed me. Only reason he didn't was he wanted to take his time about finishing me off." He peered up, puzzled. "How'd you hear about it?"

Koski was curt. "Haven't heard all I want to, yet. For instance, no marks on you. Where'd all the blood come from?"

"I slugged Maury in the snout. That's where the blood came from." Belton got his ankles freed. He slid out of the bunk. He was inches taller than Koski. His shoulders bulked like a bull's, beneath the blue jersey. "What's the idea, putting the quiz on me?"

Koski pointed at the bunk. "Funny his nosebleed didn't get any gore on the bedding." He made a grab for the neck of Belton's jersey. "None on your shirt, either."

Belton struck at the lieutenant's arm: "What are you strong-arming me for? I'm the injured party!"

Koski jolted him with a short-arm to the chops.

The wrestler wrapped his arms around Koski's waist, lifted him off the cabin floor. Koski's toes barely touched the planking. His ribs were being crushed in a paralyzing bear hug. Koski decided it was no time to be dainty. He jabbed stiff fingers at Belton's nose. Fingertips caught the wrestler's nostrils, forced his head back.

BELTON'S hold relaxed. He stumbled backward, twisted away, put his hands to his face, whimpering.

Koski poked him in the pit of the stomach to straighten him up. "Stop blubbing. If you don't come through quick with the low-down about what happened on this tub, I'll make you squeal louder than that. One way or another—you name it."

He shoved the wrestler aft.

Through the open port in the *Sea-Dog's* main cabin came the hollow hoarseness of the *Vigilant's* loudspeaker:

"Attention *Vigilant*! Attention *Vigilant*! Motorist on City Island Causeway reports body in water near rocks eastern end of cause-

way, thirty feet from shore. Disregard check-up on small craft and investigate. Nine-eleven p.m. Authority, Bronx Bureau Police Communications. Acknowledge. Over."

Mulcahey bellowed above the wind. "Hear that, Lieutenant?"

Koski put his face to the porthole. "Tell 'em we've already got hold of one end of that line. We'll follow it up." That was another of headquarter's angles that always irked him; the big shields downtown always seemed to pay more attention to dead bodies than live people. Koski looked at it differently; if a man was dead enough to float, he'd wait for you to come and get him. A human in danger might not be able to wait for help.

He wasn't quite sure how pressing the peril was, here on the ketch. But he could sense its close presence from the frightened glances Sydna Perris shot at Ham Belton.

The wrestler huddled against one end of a main-cabin berth; his face was slack-muscled with fear, but there was still some bluster in his voice.

"You've no right to keep me here on board, against my will."

Koski eyed him bleakly. "I'm not keeping you. I didn't tie you up. Remember? I cut you loose. You can go ashore any time you like. It'll be a sweet swim. I'll have a resuscitator ready to pump air into you when they drag you ashore."

Sydna Perris cried: "Why don't you find that—floating man and use it on him! Maybe it's Maury!"

Belton nodded heavily. "Be just like that neurotic buzzard to put us in a jam by doing the Dutch."

Koski picked up the cowhide suitcase that stood by the lavatory door. "You two act like you're rehearsing a duet in double-talk. Here's a jealous husband catches his wife alone with his best friend. You say he beat you up. You claim he went away but you can't say why. Your story is he was coming back to cut your gizzards out . . . but both of you are alive. And Perris hasn't showed. What makes you so sure he's dead?"

Sydna retorted angrily: "I'm *not* so sure! He went ashore in the dinghy. Maybe it tipped over. Maybe he's still alive. You should hurry and find him before it's too late to help him—instead of browbeating us!"

"You don't know why he went ashore. You can't tell whether he got there or not. Still, you seem pretty sure he's drifting around up there by the Causeway. You're a big help."

Belton growled: "I've told you all I know. Maury got excited about my being here alone with Sydna. He went clean off his rocker."

"Don't give me that broken record routine again." Koski shook the suitcase. It was light. He opened it. It was empty, except for another whiff of that queer, sickeningly sweet odor. "Perris comes to spend a weekend on his yacht. Brings along a suitcase. What happened to the stuff that was in it?"

Belton snorted scornfully. "You going to blame us for everything Maury did? He brought the luggage aboard. I never even noticed the blame thing until just now. How would we know when he unpacked, or what he did with his things?"

Koski said: "Things. Yair." He opened the lavatory door. Linoleum-covered floorboards around the toilet had been pulled out, exposing piping and the curved planking of the hull.

"Who's the plumber?" he asked.

Sydna cried irritably: "Captain Vaughn did that. He thought a valve was leaking."

"Um."

THERE was plenty queer about the *Sea-Dog*, but it wasn't valves. Panamanian registry. Trip to Havana. Wrong-way Corrigan business about coming north when everybody else was going south. Guy who seemed to have gobs of money, still nobody knew how he got it. To top it, the stove-in dinghy—and a dead man out there in the darkness somewhere.

Koski looked in the galley. Behind the door was a white steward's jacket. In

one pocket, a bank book. Seaman's Savings Bank. In account with Frank Kaalohti. \$204 balance. Regular weekly deposits.

Koski stuck the bank book in his slicker. The couple in the cabin weren't in a position to see what he was doing.

He went up to the cockpit. "Bring that buzzsaw on board, Sarge." He stood by the bowline Mulcahey had cleated to the ketch. "There's a couple more Kilkeny cats down below, Joe. Don't think there's much yowl left in 'em. But don't let either of 'em get behind you."

The engineer crawled painfully from the police boat's forward deck to the *Sea-Dog*.

Mulcahey followed. "You towing us in, Steve?"

"No. Going in, myself. To the club. After the steward and captain. Then I'll slide over and look for that floater."

He crossed to the *Vigilant*, cast off, backed away, swung the black nose toward the three blue lights on the Neptune Club mast.

The northwester was a half gale now; the moored yachts heeled over under bare spars.

CHAPTER IV

RUNAWAY KETCH



DEFTLY Koski brought the *Vigilant* beside the club float, put out lines, went up the gangplank to the graveled walk with its white-washed stones.

A swingy trumpet hit a high jive note above a soft-stringed guitar background in the club dining-room. The long, low clubhouse was mellow with light. This would be the Saturday night party for club members and guests. Koski thought of a dead man, dancing in the channel chop.

He went around to a screened veranda. Half a dozen shadowy figures sat in the gloom, rocking, talking. The crewman's porch. He called:

"Captain Vaugh?"

A gruff bass query: "Who wants him?"

"Harbor Police."

The movement of the rocking chairs ceased. There were low murmurings. One figure got up, pushed open the screen door, came out.

A tall, rawboned hulk of a seafaring man. Sharp beak of a nose. Steel-framed spectacles. Iron gray hair.

The man asked sourly, "Did Perris trim the lovebirds' feathers?"

Koski started back toward the float. "When'd you see Perris last?"

Captain Jeff Vaughn followed reluctantly. "Hour and a half ago, I'd say. Here at the club."

"Ordered you off the ketch, with the others?"

"Yep. Not that I'm taking any orders from him—Mrs. Perris owns the boat. But it looked like I'd best be ashore while they had their brawl out. So I didn't argue with him when he told me to pack and shove off."

"This before he had his bout with Belton?"

"How's that?" Vaughn cupped palm to ear. "There wasn't any bout. That scut Belton wouldn't have talked back to a kitten. He was scared witless whenever Perris was around."

"Um. Did the steward come ashore with you?"

"No, sir. Perris rowed me in, tried to make me take a fistful of cash. I wouldn't touch it, of course."

"Why not?"

"Couldn't afford to let him think he could discharge me like that. I signed on as master, regular ship style. Owner is the only one who can pay me off. Besides, I know Perris. Tomorrow he'd likely accuse me of robbing him. They say he's made a great success in putting on those theatrical shows. But I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw an anchor. No, sir. He'd steal your last piece of change if you were starving; that's the kind of fella he is."

"Didn't happen to see him bring the

steward ashore?"

"No, sir. Expect he did, though. Said he was going to. Good Godfrey Mighty!" Vaugh stopped by the gangplank rail, shaded his eyes. "Who's taking her out, on a night like this?"

Silhouetted against the lights of a tug, the dark outline of the *Sea-Dog* was moving swiftly out past the Point.

Koski took the float in two strides, hurdled the police boat's coaming, slapped the starter. "Cast off, Cap."

Vaugh ran to the cleat. "Take it away." He swung himself on the stern deck as the horses snorted under the motor hatch.

Koski threw the clutch lever. The *Vigilant* shook solid water off her bow, lifted her nose, gained speed.

Vaugh shouted over the *hrrrush* of water: "Who's aboard her?"

Koski told him, curtly. His concern was—who *wasn't* on board the sketch. Had one of that bunch managed to shove Mulcahey overside?

He probed the night with the searchlight, holding it on the buoy where the *Sea-Dog* had been moored. If Joe had gone in the drink, he'd have tried to make that buoy—if he'd been able to swim. But then, if they'd been able to heave him over, it would have been because the sergeant wasn't in any shape to navigate.

There was no sign of an uplifted arm or any bobbing head in that welter of water.

THE ketch had vanished around the Point. Whoever was at the wheel of the *Sea-Dog* probably intended to run her inshore on the other side of the Island.

Vaugh came into the pilot house. "Myself, I wouldn't care to handle her in this. Not for all she's worth! She's been taking in water so fast the last few days I've had to run the pump every couple hours."

That wouldn't make any difference, Steve told himself, if they planned to beach her right away.

The police boat plunged wildly as she roared around the Point. The searchlight poked through the spray. There was no vessel of the *Sea-Dog's* size in there.

Then she must be heading for Hell Gate, the East River, the Bay—and open ocean! What lunatic thought a leaky auxiliary could run away from a police patrol in narrow waters like that? And why would anyone want to risk it? Was there something about the *Sea-Dog* that justified taking that kind of crazy gamble?

"Grab the wheel." He waved to Vaugh. "Keep her a point west of Stepping Stones. We ought to catch her before she gets to Throgs Neck." He took the Thompson from its rack, checked the load.

He snapped the switch on the two-way:

"Patrol Nine to W-N-P-D. Are you getting me? Over." He flicked the lever.

A hollow voice from the speaker said: "We get you, *Vigilant*. Are you checking on that floater? *Take it.*"

He told the dispatcher what he was doing. Gave his position. Requested Patrol Six at Randalls to cover Hell Gate if by any mishap Nine failed to overtake the *Sea-Dog*.

Vaugh peered across the storm-wracked waves. "Don't see anything looks like a ketch."

"You're heading too close to Throgs. Hold her in the channel." Koski bit off his words. How could a man hold master's papers and not know how to steer a course! Or could there be a purpose to that sort of blundering?

He went up on the foredeck, manipulated the search beam from atop the pilot house.

The *Sea-Dog* would be running without lights. That was dangerous at any time, in ship traffic. It was worse, when whitecaps hid a white hull in the dark.

The faraway emerald eye of the Stepping Stones light flickered—once, twice. Twin masts of a ketch, coming between the lighthouse and the police boat, might

cause such a flicker.

Koski knelt, indicated the course to Vaugh.

The *Sea-Dog* was a half mile ahead. Patrol Nine smashed through the tumbling crests at a good twenty knots. The auxiliary couldn't be making more than five.

Koski clung to the handrail, moved along the waterway to the ventilator. "Come up on her starboard quarter, Cap. Slow her to the ketch's speed. Hold her there while I find out what makes."

The *Sea-Dog's* masts swung in erratic pendulum sweeps as she buried her bow in the troughs.

The oilskin-wrapped figure crouching by the wheel might have been man, woman—or wrestler. It wasn't Mulcahey.

The *Vigilant* drew alongside.

Koski shone the beam in the helmsman's face. It was Buzz Cotlett. The engineer tried to shield his eyes but the ketch fell off, broadside to the sweep of the waves. Her masts swung down so the spreaders touched water.

Koski pounded on the pilot house roof. "Slow her, Cap! SLOW! I!"

The *Vigilant* turned to follow the *Sea-Dog's* bow. The police boat heeled, pitched. Her propeller came out of the water. The motor screeched.

Through the glass, Koski could see Vaugh, face screwed up, fumbling at the throttle. The lieutenant dived for the pilot house.

The patrol boat's tail went down. She plunged ahead at top speed. Her nose crossed the *Sea-Dog's* bow. The motor died.

Koski seized Vaugh's shoulder, wrenched him around. "Get your flippers off that wheel."

VAUGH swung his arm up clumsily, as if to steady himself. Koski drove a stiff right at his chin.

There was a violent crash. A splintering of wood. The *Vigilant* rolled over on her side. Koski was flung off his feet, hit the wheel with jarring force.

At the same instant he felt the paralyzing impact of the length of pipe Vaugh swung up and down—once—twice!

The gloom burst into flaming light that became so over-poweringly bright it was utter darkness.

The shock of cold water made Koski gasp. The gasp was choked before it barely began; he was drawing salt water into his lungs instead of air. He was under water!

He let his muscles go limp. No sense swimming while he couldn't tell which way was up. The current tugged at him. Something smashed at his skull, stunned him. He opened his mouth, gulped.

A tremendous roaring in his ears. A motor exhaust! He had surfaced.

He'd come up beneath the police boat's stern, banged his head against a propeller blade.

Vaugh had probably tossed him over-side from the pilot house; he'd drifted the length of the *Vigilant's* hull under water!

He caught the patrol boat's exhaust pipe; held on, though the metal scorched his fingers. The black transom above him, with the white letters: POLICE, *New York City*, lurched and twisted like a frantic porpoise. It would be tough to climb aboard over the stern even in calm weather. With the old girl rearing and plunging like this, it would be almost impossible.

A few yards off to port the *Sea-Dog* loomed up against the ghostly green of the Stepping Stone Light. Her Diesel was going *cuddle-up, cuddle-up*, but her clutch wasn't in, she wasn't moving. The ketch wallowed sluggishly in the tumbling waves. She seemed to be lower in the water than she'd been on the mooring.

Koski gauged his chances. He might not be able to muscle himself up over the *Vigilant's* stern, with his water-soaked clothes, his knife-slashed arm, that crack on the skull from Vaugh's piece of pipe. But if he was going to be able to do anything for Joe Mulcahey, he had to

get back aboard.

He had one knee on the exhaust pipe, his fingertips touching a stern chock, was summoning all his reserve strength to pull himself up to the gunwale, when a voice only a couple of feet from his ear growled:

"She'll go down in half an hour; it'll look as if she simply sank in the storm."

That was Cap Vaugh talking! He was still on the *Vigilant*!

Who was the treacherous old rat speaking to? Who had come aboard from the ketch, to join him?

Koski let himself down into the water again, listening. It would be committing suicide to climb into the cockpit with Vaugh waiting for him with that Thompson sub-machine-gun.

But he heard no more voices, nothing except the slam of the patrol boat's motor hatch. Vaugh was getting set to drive the hundred and eighty horses, leaving the ketch, with anyone who might still be on her, to founder.

Maybe Joe Mulcahey wasn't on board the *Sea-Dog*. Maybe the sarge wasn't even alive now? But that was the only chance Koski could grasp at.

He toed off one boot, pulled loose his sock. He swam around to the *Vigilant's* starboard side, dived beneath the hull.

He stayed under until he heard the starter whine, the motor explode into life.

He took two desperate strokes to get clear of the propeller before the clutch gears meshed. He nearly made it, but one of the spinning blades sliced at his right foot.

When he came to the surface, he was in a lather of foam from the police boat's wake. His foot was numb; he couldn't be sure how many toes he still had left but he wasn't stopping to count them now.

THE wash of Patrol Nine had swept him another five yards away from the *Sea-Dog*. The ketch was drifting downwind.

He swam after her, putting every-

thing into the first minute. He could sprint that long. But if he couldn't catch her in sixty seconds, then he would probably never be able to make it.

He gained, but the effort whipped him. He felt as if his legs were weighted with lead diving shoes.

The minutes became two. He was still ten feet away. The wind drove the ketch faster. The gap between him and that white stern widened slowly.

He had been in a spot like this once before. Washed overboard, offshore in a gale, stunned and unable to swim back to the *Vigilant*. He would have been a goner that time if Mulcahey hadn't jumped over and come for him.

The thought of the blundering, fearless, slap-happy, wise-cracking Irishman who'd been in—and out, of so many tight spots with him, kept Koski's arms threshing long after there was any possibility of his catching up with the *Sea-Dog*.

He couldn't have held how long it was before a comber picked him up, flung him forward like a surf rider. He rode the crest, calling on his last ounce of energy.

He touched the ketch's tail-pipe as the comber went under her stern, dragging him down. He hung on.

The *Vigilant's* port running light was a red pinpoint off toward City Island by the time he'd summoned strength enough to pull himself up to the *Sea-Dog's* taffrail and over it.

Water was sloshing ominously below deck. Also something was churning around in the water which half-filled her cockpit, too. A dead man.

Maybe that's Joe, Koski raged silently. Maybe that's old sarge!

It was Buzz Cotlett. His skull had been beaten to a pulp.

The lieutenant stumbled below. Lights were on. Water was up to the floorboards. Nobody was in the main cabin.

"Joe!" he called hoarsely. "Irish!"
Bump! From the forecabin. He had heard that bump before.

He slipped and slid on oily floorboards, skidded up forward. There was a different figure in the bunk where he'd found Belton.

A slim, dark, mustached man lay there, bound and gagged as the wrestler had been. A man whose features Koski had seen on movie screens and television sets.

Maury Perris!

CHAPTER V

CORNERED WILDCAT



OSKI ripped the gag out of the man's mouth with no unnecessary gentleness. "Where's the sergeant?"

Perris' lips were puffy with blisters. "Who? What sergeant? They only let me out a half hour ago." He groaned. "And then only to burn my mouth with cigarettes."

"Great bunch you had on board." Koski cut his bonds. "Where's the seacock on this craft?"

"Beside the motor. Starboard side." Perris rolled off the bunk, staggered to his feet.

"Close it," Koski ordered. "Know how to start your bilge pump?"

"Yes."

"Get it going." The lieutenant searched the sail locker, forward. Looked in the toilet, the galley. No sign of Mulcahey.

He went back to the cockpit, pushed the clutch lever. The *Sea-Dog* shuddered, answered her helm heavily.

He put her stern to the wind; pointed her bowsprit down Sound toward the spot where he had last seen the *Vigilant's* running lights.

From the motor-room, Perris called: "Seacock's closed."

"Get that pump going." Koski examined his foot. The screw-blade had sheared off the side and toe of the boot. He felt of his own toes. They were all there. But his hand came away warm

and sticky.

He felt weak.

Can't droop off now, he told himself angrily.

Neither Mrs. Perris nor Ham Belton was aboard. It must have been one of that pair who had escaped on the *Vigilant* with Vaugh. Which one it was and what had happened to the other one, was of strictly secondary importance until Koski had learned what had happened to Mulcahey.

He lashed the wheel with a rope becket, went below to the galley, found a bottle of Cuban rum, nearly full.

He let half a pint burn his throat, poured the rest over his cut foot. The sting, inside and outside, braced him.

Perris emerged from the motor room under the companionway. "Pump's running. But it'll take a week to get her dry."

"Not if you bail, too," Koski snapped. "Grab a bucket and squat down there in the bilge. Get a pail to work."

"I can't," Perris whined. "I can hardly stand."

"You'll stand. And for a lot, before this is done! *Jump!*"

"You can't blame me for any of this." The producer began to pour water into the galley sink.

"Not for your engineer's death, I suppose?"

"Buzz?" The swollen mouth hung slackly open. "Buzz killed?"

"Back there in the cockpit. With his dome caved in." Koski lifted a bunk cushion. There might be just room enough in the locker beneath to cram a body as big as the sergeant's.

"I didn't do it." Perris shivered. "I'd never have hurt Buzz. He was a great little joker. I liked Buzz."

"How about your steward? Like him, the same way?"

"I hate him. He's Sydna's pick, not mine. He does what she tells him, never sees anything she doesn't want him to. I paid him off quick, when I got out here, but they tied me up and threw me in the lazarette before I could row him—"

Koski didn't hear the rest of it; he was running aft.

The lazarette. How could he have been dumb enough to forget that a ketch like this would have to store its bottled gas, for cooking and refrigeration, in a cubbyhole beneath the stern deck!

The tiny hatch was right behind the wheel. He had been sitting on it while he lashed the becket in place!

He tore the hatch open, leaned over, stuck his arm down into the darkness. Water sloshing, tiller lines creaking. And rubber! Mulcahey's slicker!

Koski glanced forward to make sure Perris was still emptying water into the galley sink. It would be too easy for somebody to bop him, once he squeezed into that deep, narrow compartment.

He let himself down, not daring to hope.

Yet why would Mulcahey's body have been kept on board? More likely the intent had been to hold him as a hostage. That idea might have been abandoned after Vaughn took over the *Vigilant*.

JOE was breathing. The hair on the back of his head was matted with oil and blood.

It took a while to hoist him up through the hatch, into the cockpit. Koski didn't want to move him any more than necessary. Maybe the sarge had a fractured skull.

In the galley was an unopened quart of Pieper Heidsick, '28. Perris stared as Lieutenant Koski knocked the head off the bottle.

"I'd let you try some of your own champagne, but the bubbles might bruise your tender little lips. What were they trying to get you to tell 'em?"

Perris just shook his head.

"Where you'd hidden the stuff you'd brought up from Cuba and meant to take ashore in that suitcase, I expect."

Perris said nothing.

Koski peered into the toilet-room. "Where is that suitcase? Did they find the stuff and take it with them?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." The Duke of Dames wiped a smear of oil across his nose.

"That's why they didn't mind letting you go down with the ketch," Koski nodded. "They made you sing. You told 'em where you'd hidden it."

Perris clamped his mouth shut, winced at the pain it caused.

Koski took the champagne, went back, dribbled a little between Mulcahey's half-open lips.

The sergeant sputtered, made gagging noises, opened one eye. "I'll break every living bone in your— *Steve!*"

He tried to sit up. Koski put a palm on his chest, held him down.

"Easy. Drink this moose juice. How you feel?"

"Head aches," the sergeant grumbled. "Ears ring. I see double. I could spit sewage. But show me that cruddy wrestler and I'll feel just grand!"

"Maybe can do same, chop-chop."

Mulcahey took a gulp of the champagne, rolled over, got his knees under him, peered overside.

"Where we at, Steve?"

"Off Greenwich." Koski pointed to a red light beneath a white one, bobbing back and forth in short, irregular arcs a mile or so ahead. "There's the *Vigilant*—and maybe your wrestler and his girl are aboard her with Cap Vaughn."

Mulcahey tried to focus. "You been chasing a police boat in this old tub of a ketch?"

"Yair."

"Are you daft? We couldn't catch the old girl if she was running in reverse, Steve."

"No. But she's not running. She's waiting for us."

"You do these things with mirrors, perchance?"

"With a sock. And a handkerchief, Sarge. Stuffed into her water intake. Our hundred and eighty horses must have overheated slightly, I'm afraid. Maybe we'll find cylinders frozen, so the repair boys at Randalls will have to do a little reaming on her. But that

won't be all we'll find."

Mulcahey breathed: "Ah, now, Steve. Does your magic wand routine include producing some weapons with which to pacify these dillies? Or do we go after them barehanded?"

Koski said tightly: "We'll try dosing them with their own medicine, Joseph."

Finally, after a long chase, the *Sea-Dog* hauled up even with the *Vigilant*. Koski hailed her:

"Ahoy, police boat."

Koski repeated the hail as the *Sea-Dog* slid slowly up to the *Vigilant's* starboard quarter. Above the *Vigilant's* coaming three heads watched the rubber-coated figure standing by the ketch's wheel.

Captain Vaughn shouted: "Sheer off!"

The *Sea-Dog* closed in. Flame spat from the ketch's rail.

A scream came from the figure at the wheel. The man toppled. Before he hit the deck, Mulcahey sprang from the shadow of the ketch's forecastle hatch, landed in the patrol boat's stern. At the same instant, Koski's pistol spoke sharply—once, twice.

VAUGHN'S head lolled over the coaming. The other two turned toward the sergeant. Koski took a flying leap from beside the body of Maury Perris, hit Sydna between the shoulders as she aimed her automatic at Mulcahey.

The sergeant took a full minute to subdue Ham Belton. The last forty seconds were not precisely necessary.

"Creep up on me from behind, would ye?" Mulcahey reverted to the Hibernian when in full cry of battle. "Leave me to drown, would ye?"

Sydna squirmed beneath Koski's weight. He stamped on her wrist, got the automatic. She clawed at his eyes. He batted her on the ear with the forty-five. She spat in his face.

He called grimly, "Hustle that first aid kit, Sarge."

Mulcahey's voice was anxious: "Did that tommy get you, Steve?"

"No. It got Perris. I just want some

tape to fix this hellcat's wrists."

Mulcahey tripped over Vaughn: "This one here—you'll not be needing to tie him."

"Maybe he got the best deal at that, Joe. All over, quick. These two will have a long time to think about what's coming to them. For the steward's murder. Cotlett's and Perris'."

Mulcahey brought the adhesive.

"Most likely a jury will take pity on the poor little girl who was misled into a life of sordid crime by her unscrupulous husband."

Sydna snarled something no poor little girl should have uttered.

Koski slapped the first piece of tape across her mouth.

"My guess, Sarge, is that this unwholesome little witch was the core of the whole, rotten apple. The yacht was hers. Idea of making dough with it was probably hers, too. She hired the crew from around her home town. She most likely corrupted that engineer so he'd do anything she wanted. Likewise the steward. Chances are she had the Cuban connections to get the stuff, too."

"What stuff?"

"Marihuana. What did you think those trips to Cuba were for? The *Sea-Dog* went down there, loaded up with a hundred pounds or so of raw weed, brought it to New York."

"There is such a thing as customs inspection, is there not?" The sergeant opened the motor hatch, touched the hot metal.

"Yair. Easy for a yacht to skip it by sailing in from Block Island Sound instead of through the harbor. Illegal, of course, but the whole setup would have earned them pen-sentences, anyway."

Mulcahey found the suitcase, opened it. "This is the junk they make muggles out of?"

"Muggles. And murderers. And stick-ups. Dozen kind of crimes. Yair. Also you can make a lot of moola out of that weed, if you don't care how you make it. Sells for around a hundred bucks a pound, raw."

"They were all in it, Steve? The crew, and all?"

"Doubt it. Vaugh was. Buzz was smoking the stuff, whether he was in on the whole smuggling deal or not. He was loaded to the gills when I ran into him in the Beacon tonight. This dame had to gun Cotlett, after conning him along into taking the ketch off the mooring. She was probably afraid of him while he was on the stuff, thinking he'd talk too much and give the game away. That's the way she paid off all her crew—with lead."

Mulcahey puffed out his cheeks, sagely.

"This floater up by the Causeway. You figure that he is Frank Kaalohti?"

"I figure Perris snapped the switch on the steward, soon's he got on board. Likely Kaalohti was on a muggles-jag, too, and tried to interfere when Perris began to bawl out his wife for double-crossing him. It didn't look right for him to have gone ashore leaving his bank deposit book. But the amounts he'd been sticking away in savings were too small for him to have been in on the Mary Warner smuggling. So they must have settled on knocking him off after he overheard Mrs. Perris toning down her husband."

"I thought he half killed his wife," Mulcahey protested.

"He might have meant to. He came on board with homicide in his heart, I suppose. Maybe he did beat up Belton. But she must have cooled down the late Mr. Perris by telling him she had left incriminating information ashore somewhere, covering their weed-running together. If he did anything to her, the evidence would come out. Then Perris would go to the clink, lose his business, so on."

MULCAHEY felt of the motor again. "This one is getting cooled off, too."

"We'll try turning her over in a minute and go after that ketch before she hits the rocks. That's all there was to it, Joe, except that after she slowed Per-

ris down, she and Belton jumped him. They tied him up and tried to get him to tell her where he'd stashed the stuff they'd brought in on the last trip north. He must have kept that secret to himself."

"Ah, ha! He knew if he told her, that would be curtains for him!"

"Sure. I'd say he stowed it in the lazarette, where they found it when they went to put you in there in place of Perris. But Perris must have known she meant to exit him anyway. Because after she got him where she wanted him, she took off his rings and his wrist-watch and all the stuff that would identify him, put 'em on the dead steward and dumped him overboard."

"I take it back about the jury. If you go on the stand to tell 'em."

"Yair. They probably let Kaalohti's face get chewed up a little by the propeller, so he wouldn't be recognizable. Then they ran him ashore in the dink, and punched it full of holes. Left it near the joint where Buzz usually went to lap up beer, so he'd get blamed—if it did come to a murder indictment."

"All that mahuska about Perris tying Belton up and walloping his wife was just window-dressing they fixed up when they saw the *Vigilant* coming to investigate, huh?"

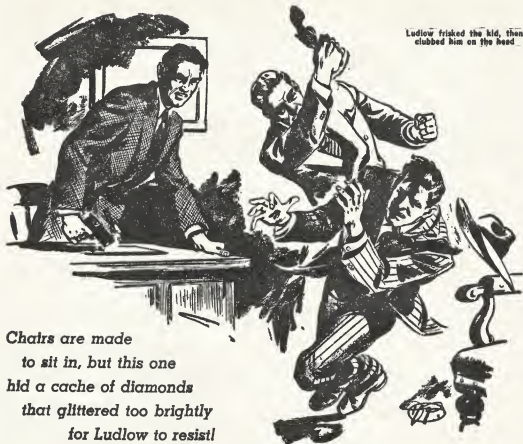
"Might say so, Irish. A dummy trick, all right. If a dame was really scared she was going to get her throat cut, I figured that she'd have something better than a pillow to defend herself with."

The loudspeaker began to squawk:

"Attention *Vigilant*. Attention *Vigilant*. Small craft reported ashore on eastern side of Little Neck Bay. Investigate. Authority, Manhattan Police Communications. Ten-forty p. m. That is all."

Mulcahey swore. "Now it's some scow ashore on a mud flat they want us to chase after. I never *will* be able to square myself with my doll!"

"What you kicking about?" Warily Koski pushed the starter button. "It's a nice night for a boat ride, isn't it?"



Ludlow frisked the kid, then clubbed him on the head.

*Chairs are made
to sit in, but this one
hid a cache of diamonds
that glittered too brightly
for Ludlow to resist!*

THE CHAIR

By RICHARD BRISTER

MARVIN LUDLOW swung the rented station wagon into the graveled driveway, letting his lip curl a little at the sign on the gatepost which said *Shady Acres, H. V. Farrington*. The printing on the sign had dignity, the kind of class which you pronounce "closs," and the big rambling stone house at the end of the drive was no letdown, Ludlow observed, as he pulled to a halt under the porte-cochere.

He spotted the black wreath on the

door and said under his breath, "Well, Herb found himself a nice nest to die in. I'll hand him that much."

The widow herself answered Ludlow's rap on the door. She was a tall, large-jointed woman in her middle thirties, by the look of her. Her eyes were red from much crying. Her mouth was drawn down at the corners. She looked like hell, Ludlow decided, and it was not just because she'd so recently lost her dear husband. This babe was just nat-

urally unattractive.

"Yes?" she said.

She didn't know Ludlow. He and Herb had dissolved their "business" partnership before Herb had met her.

"I'm Marvin Ludlow, Mrs. Farrington."

"Oh, yes, Herb's old partner. How do you do, Mr. Ludlow. Do come in, won't you? I feel as if I already know you. Herb spoke of you often."

Ludlow went in. She took his hat and he said, "I really should have called sooner, but I thought it might be best to wait a few weeks, until you—"

"So thoughtful of you," she murmured. "Could I give you a cup of tea, Mr. Ludlow?"

"Well—yes, thank you." He despised tea. He smiled at her smoothly as she buzzed for a servant. He started to say, "Thought I'd kill two birds with one stone on this visit," but checked himself in time, amending it to "—combine my errands."

"Combine your errands?" she said blankly. "Oh, you mean that chair?"

He nodded. "That chair" to which she referred had once graced the offices of Farrington and Ludlow, Inc., Importers. Farrington and Ludlow, on the surface, had looked like a highly respectable wool import business. Actually, Ludlow and Herb Farrington had been chiefly interested in diamonds.

Using the wool import setup as a blind, they had, over a period of five years, succeeded in smuggling a fortune in diamonds into the country. Herb had been the brains of the outfit, and in all that time they'd only once been in any real danger.

ONE afternoon around five-thirty, when Herb and Ludlow were the only ones left in the office, a smart young plainclothesman drifted into the place and started asking a few leading questions. He was just a kid full of ambition to make like a hero. He'd come up there without much to work on, which he frankly admitted.

Herb had played cat and mouse with him for a while, trying to find out just how much the kid knew, and who else, if anybody, shared the young copper's suspicions.

The kid had been sitting in their big, leather-upholstered guest chair, all this time Herb was batting the breeze back and forth with him. Ludlow could remember how nervous that made him, because this was no ordinary chair in which the kid copper was sitting.

There was an innocuous-looking foot plate on one of the legs. You took the cap off by twisting it clockwise a few degrees, and there was an equally innocent appearing screw underneath. But when you unscrewed that screw and took it out, you let out a miniature flood of very beautiful ice, all shapes and sizes.

Herb had seemed to enjoy the irony of the situation, the cop sitting on a fortune in smuggled diamonds as he asked his questions.

What it had all boiled down to was that the kid was trying to trace a certain stone, easily identifiable because of its size and the way it had been cut. A hunch had brought him up there, but he hadn't shared his suspicions with anyone else yet, for fear of being laughed at.

The kid finally got up to go, chuckling apologetically for having made all this trouble.

"Guess I been barking up the wrong tree," he said, and held out his hand toward Herb.

That was when Herb opened his desk drawer, saying, "That's quite all right, son. Here, let me give you a cigar."

What came out of the desk drawer was Herb's automatic. He pointed it right at the young plainclothesman, and walked around the desk. Herb's eyes flickered toward Ludlow, and Ludlow frisked the kid, relieved him of his own gun, and then clubbed him on the head with it.

"This kid wasn't off the scent," Herb said, breathing fast, as he stared down at the unconscious policeman. "He was

levelling on it though. I don't think anyone knew he was coming up here. Or even about his suspicions. We've got to kill this man, Marv."

"He's a cop," Ludlow gulped. "That's asking for it, Herb. Maybe we could buy him. Maybe—"

"Don't talk rot. He's a Jack Armstrong. We've got to kill him. And after we do, I'm getting out of the racket. My heart won't stand this sort of excitement."

Herb had had rheumatic fever as a boy; his heart had been permanently damaged.

"How do we kill him?" Ludlow had groaned, feeling the cold sweat begin to crawl on him as he looked down at the young plainclothesman.

They had tapped him on the skull a few more times, to make sure he didn't come to. They had poured whisky on him, and hauled him out between them, later that evening, making him look like a drunk. They'd got him into Ludlow's car, and around two in the morning they'd got him into the East River, with a nice big stone tied to him.

There'd never been any beef on it. The kid had told them a straight story. He hadn't shared his suspicions of them with any of his co-workers.

Herb had another slight heart attack, shortly afterward. One afternoon at a cocktail party he met a lonely, unattractively babe with a barrel of money. He married her four months later, had another heart attack during his honeymoon, and used it as an excuse to quit business and live on her money.

There'd been a lot of hot ice on hand when Herb quit, stuff they'd have to hang onto quite a while before unloading. Herb took his half of it and he took the big, leather-upholstered guest chair from the office.

"So long, pal," he grinned at Ludlow. "Been nice working with you. Hate running out on you this way, Marv, but—Well, maybe someday I'll make it up to you."

So now Herb was dead. And in his

will, Herb had stipulated that the big, leather-upholstered guest chair was to go to Ludlow, "as a memento of a happy business association."

Ludlow smiled at the widow and thought that was very nice of Herb, to remember an old "business associate" this way.

"I thought I'd take the chair along with me this afternoon, Mrs. Farrington. If that's all right with you."

"Yes." She bit on her lip. "Yes, of course, Mr. Ludlow." The tea service came and she made much of the pouring. She gave him a dinky napkin to drape over his knee and offered a small plate piled high with cookies. "He was a wonderful man, wasn't he?" she said, and a dull sort of eagerness was in her red eyes.

"The best," Ludlow said, patting his smiling lips with the napkin to hide his amusement. "They don't come twice like Herb."

"Everyone liked him," she said. "Really, I'll always be thankful for the few months of his life I was allowed to share with him. What he saw in poor little me, I just can't imagine."

IT WAS obvious to Ludlow that she'd idolized him. Herb always had that slickness about him. Even at the office, the help had gone overboard for him. What an operator! Ludlow felt a small twinge of envy for the dead man; he had never quite measured up to Herb's stature, and even in death the guy towered above him.

"I haven't moved any of his things yet," she said. "See, there's his pipe rack and all his pipes over there by his favorite chair in the corner. Just as he left them. Would you care to look at his den, Mr. Ludlow? Herb loved it so much, in there. He was a great reader. I've locked the door, but every once in a while I open it and look in, half-expecting to see him. I suppose that's morbid of me, but—"

"Not at all. Quite understandable, Mrs. Farrington," Ludlow said. He

looked over sharply. This dame was squirrely, he decided. She gave him the fidgets. "Is the chair in there?" he said, rising.

"Yes." She led the way, taking a key from her pocket. She opened the door, but all he saw of the den, actually, was the chair, the beautiful, big, leather-upholstered guest chair in which a young plainclothesman had once sat, over a fortune in smuggled diamonds.

He was eager to close with her about the chair and be gone. He said, "It was swell of Herb to remember me in terms of this chair, Mrs. Farrington. He knew I always admired it, down at the office. He was a nice guy, your husband."

She was pathetically eager to hear more about what a great guy Herb had been, but he finally got her to call the butler, and they carried the chair out to the station wagon. Ludlow had driven only three quarters of a mile from the place when he stopped in a side road to give the chair a quick going-over.

It was the left front foot plate that engaged his attention. He tried to twist it. It wouldn't budge. He took out the screwdriver he'd brought along for precisely this purpose, and pried the plate gently.

He ended up swearing violently under his breath. He took a few minutes to think, then found a movie house that was running a matinee, and killed a couple of hours before driving back to see Herb's widow.

"Oh," she said, when she saw who it was calling, "is there something wrong, Mr. Ludlow?" She looked, he noticed, a bit guilty.

"Mrs. Farrington, I was very fond of Herb. He was a very good friend. He wanted me to have that chair, as you undoubtedly realize, for sentimental reasons."

"I'm afraid I don't understand." A corny line, read very poorly.

He said, "When I got it home, I took a better look at it."

"Yes?"

"I knew that chair very well, Mrs.

Farrington. I saw a very great deal of the chair for three years, at the office. The reproduction you turned over to me was a fairly professional job. Unfortunately, from your standpoint, it was not quite good enough to fool me."

She was blushing furiously now. He didn't let up on her, either.

"Who did the job for you?" he said.

She debated a moment, then sighed, "A man named Dunbar, on Walnut Street, in the city. You've smoked me out, Mr. Ludlow. I guess I should be ashamed of myself. I'm not, though. He loved that chair. He sat in it more than in any other. I wanted it, as a memento of him. I didn't see the harm in giving you an identical chair, provided you didn't guess at my little deception."

"I did."

She smiled wanly. "Yes . . ."

"It was Herb's wish that I have the chair, I mean the real chair, Mrs. Farrington. I'm afraid I intend to insist on my rights, in the circumstances."

She didn't fight it. She was licked, and knew it. The real chair, the original, was already ensconced in the den, he discovered, when she ordered to butler to help him with it. Ludlow was grimly amused by the promptness with which she had made that rearrangement.

His amusement gave way to a sick rage, some minutes later, when he again stopped beside the road to inspect his new acquisition. The foot plate twisted off, as expected. He unscrewed the screw underneath, took it out, and held his hand under the chair leg, smiling with anticipation.

Nothing happened. The secret compartment in the chair leg was empty.

This second frustration caused him to grind his teeth in cold fury. He lit a cigarette with a trembling hand and sat behind the wheel of the station wagon, trying to figure. Herb wouldn't have toyed with his expectations this way. When Herb died, that chair back there had contained a small fortune in diamonds.

He considered the possibility that she,

the widow, had discovered the hiding-place in the leg and removed the stuff. But that didn't look like the answer, either.

He let out a quick little gasp, gripping the wheel, and made a savage mental effort to remember the name of the man she'd mentioned, the man who'd made the reproduction of dear Herbert's chair for her.

"Dunbar," he whispered softly. "A guy named Dunbar. On Walnut Street, in the city."

Ludlow put a private investigator to work on Dunbar, and the fellow made his report two days later. F. Lytton Dunbar 3rd, was the full name, and a crest went with it. Specializing in the repairing and refinishing of fine furniture. Also custom building of pieces, if you had the pocketbook to afford it. For five or ten dollars he'd come right out to your home and remove a small scratch from your dining-room table.

"Okay," Ludlow said, "I've got the general picture. How about something specific on him?"

"Forty years old," said the man. "A widower. No children. An apartment on Ogontz Ave. Up until a week ago, that is. Then he moved over to the Glenmore Arms, at a boost of fifty a month."

"Almost as if," Ludlow murmured, "he'd come into a windfall."

"Looks like it. Just bought a new car. A Caddy. Had been driving a Chevy. He's got hold of a fast buck from somewhere."

"So have you, friend," Ludlow grinned at the investigator, and paid the man off, with a small bonus.

HE WENT around to see F. Lytton Dunbar 3rd at his place of business at ten the next morning. He'd rented another station wagon; he took the chair with him. It was a small shop in the high rent strip on Walnut, a one-man joint, but it reeked nicely of fine things, of money.

Dunbar was just a tall, pale guy with glasses and a carefully cultured accent.

"Yes, sir?"

"Got a station wagon parked out back there in the alley," said Ludlow. "With a chair in it."

"Ah . . . yes?" said the accent.

"Wondered if you'd care to try doing a reproduction," Ludlow said.

He got a lifted eyebrow out of Dunbar on that. He said, "It's a big, leather-upholstered guest chair."

"Why, the truth is, sir, I don't do that kind of work," Dunbar said, too quickly.

"Might just have a look at it."

"Yes—yes, of course I might," Dunbar said.

They went back to the alley and Dunbar peered at it over the tail-gate of the station wagon. He was paler than usual, Ludlow saw grimly.

"I'm afraid that's too big a job for me," Dunbar faltered. "I—"

"I'll meet Mrs. Farrington's price on it, Dunbar," Ludlow threw at him.

The man took off his glasses and carefully rubbed them on a piece of soft tissue. "Perhaps we'd better go inside and talk this over," he said.

"Perhaps we'd better." Ludlow couldn't help mimicking the carefully cultured accent, just a little. He disliked this man, intensely.

"Now," said Dunbar, as they sat in a little cubicle office at the back of the shop, "just who are you, sir? And precisely what was it you wanted of me?"

"Straight answers," Ludlow said bluntly.

"I'm afraid I—"

"Farrington willed that chair to me, Dunbar. I was his very good friend. The diamonds were supposed to go with the chair, if you follow my meaning."

"Diamonds?" More of the tilted eyebrow. "What dia—"

Ludlow laughed throatily. "Let's just say the diamonds that enabled you to trade your Chevy in for a new Caddy, Dunbar. And move to a fancy apartment. Now come out from in back of that funny-face and quit playing games. How much of that stuff have you unloaded so far?"

"I don't like your manner," Dunbar said huffily, but cracking a little now, around the edges.

"I'm deeply hurt. Now get this, Dunbar, and get it right. My name is Marvin Ludlow. I'm Herbert V. Farrington's former partner in the wool import business. When he died, he willed me a chair which contained a cache of diamonds. I'm here to—"

"Oh?" said the accent. "Isn't that slightly illegal, Mr. Ludlow? I mean, the Department of Internal Revenue—"

"It's not half so illegal as stealing those diamonds out of that chair, while you were making Mrs. Farrington a replica of it, and—"

"Tsk, tsks," Dunbar said maddeningly. "I could sue you for libel."

"Do you deny—"

"I certainly do," Dunbar said.

"I'll put the police on you," Ludlow raged. "I'll—"

"Will you?"

Something in Ludlow shriveled and died. There could be no calling the cops in on this. That ice was still hot. It could fry him. He knew, suddenly, that F. Lytton Dunbar 3rd had him over a barrel.

He said, "We've reached a stalemate, Dunbar. Let's be realistic."

"Yes?"

"We're both slightly soiled. No use getting at loggerheads, is there? We might hurt each other."

"How?"

Ludlow considered, then blurted, "That stuff is hot. I don't know who's taking it off your hands. Whoever is, you're playing with fire. Now I know the history of that stuff. I can get rid of it safely, and—"

"You missed your calling, Mr. Ludlow. You should join our State Department. We need a man like you, with imagination, to deal with the Russians. It's very kind of you, but I think I can struggle along without your assistance."

"Listen, you fool," Ludlow burst out, "I'm trying to tell you something for your own good. That stuff is red hot.

You keep unloading it and you'll find yourself down at Headquarters being grilled about a dead cop."

That got him. He swallowed twice on that, and turned even paler. "D-did you say a dead cop?" he faltered.

"I said a dead cop," Ludlow told him grimly. "And if you think I'm going to let you keep unloading that stuff, and eventually tie me in on that killing, you don't know me."

"Y-you killed a cop," Dunbar said. He was ash white, now. He looked at Ludlow with an expression compounded of fear and loathing.

"I killed a cop, and I'm not above killing you, Dunbar, if you don't quit this horsing around and hand over the stuff."

Ludlow pulled a small automatic from his pocket, displayed it to Dunbar, then thrust it back out of sight, but still kept his grip on it under the fabric.

"Let's have some action," he said curtly.

"Yes, let's," said Dunbar, and he spoke without the carefully cultivated accent. He stood up and, as Ludlow stood with him, made a whiplike side-arm blow, striking Ludlow with the edge of his hand, just at the elbow.

LUDLOW shot through his coat pocket, trying to get the gun up into train upon Dunbar. But the pale, spectacled man was suddenly a very fast moving target. The shot missed Dunbar's dancing feet, and now the fellow was around at Ludlow's side, was gripping Ludlow's still tingling elbow with one hand, twisting downward on his wrist with the other.

Ludlow felt as if his arm was about to be wrenched off at the shoulder. He did an instinctive front somersault, landing clumsily in a half-reupholstered Morris chair. He still held the gun. Cursing, he tried to bring it up, train it on Dunbar.

Dunbar had pulled a businesslike looking sap from his pocket. He rapped Ludlow on the wrist with it. The bone

crunched. Ludlow screamed at the pain, and watched the gun strike the floor with a metallic clatter.

Dunbar picked it up, put it into his pocket, and produced a larger gun from a shoulder holster. "It's a nice little gun," he said conversationally, "but I like my Betsy better."

"You're a cop," Ludlow said dully. "You're a plant."

"How did you like my accent, Ludlow?" He grinned, and showed his badge. "My name's Meehan. That was my brother you and Farrington chucked in the East River. I asked for this duty. Dunbar found the ice in the chair, and brought it down to Headquarters. That new Caddy, and the change of apartments was window dressing. Incidentally, we had the fix in with that private investigator you hired." His face turned brittle. "You're not really smart enough

to go around killing cops, Ludlow."

"The dame?" Ludlow croaked.

"Our innocent pawn. She still thinks her dead hubby was a great guy. She'll have to find out different when you come to trial. You crummy rat. She'll lose some of her illusions, but she can afford to. She'll be better off for it."

More cops came. They took him out through the back, where the Maria waited. The station wagon was still out there, and as he was jostled along between two big bulls, Ludlow had one final glimpse of the chair sitting inside there.

As he looked at it, the chair appeared to lose its form, to grow taller, and he could almost see himself strapped into it, his head shaved, his trouser legs cut off up to the knees. He let out a hysterical shudder and sobbed uncontrollably as the cops shoved him into the Maria.



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D, My Name Is DEATH

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT



*Jeff was hounded by the
police, death—and by
the memory of a murder!*

THE space in which Jeff Sawyer now lay gasping for breath was as narrow as a grave and no higher than a coffin. The space was blind dark and noisome with the stench of garbage and animal droppings. Yet a wild elation throbbed in Jeff's veins.

He peered slantwise out at the feet that had thudded in the dark alley behind him. He grinned at the way they

shifted uncertainly on the strip of sidewalk that was all Jeff could see from his hiding place. In the pallid dawn, trouser cuffs wrinkled blue over the insteps of shoes that were blunt of toe, thick soled and clumsy, so clumsy that the sound they'd made had warned Jeff to duck into the alley. They were policeman's shoes.

But he had not ducked quite quickly

enough. The policeman had seen him and had plunged in after him shouting, "Come out of there. I've got you covered."

As Jeff had sprung into panic flight the alley's black dark hid him at once but it could not hide the pound of his feet. Pounding after him the cop yelled, "Halt or I'll shoot," but the passage angled sharply and Jeff was shielded from his gun. Only momentarily, dawn grayed the alley's mouth toward which he hurtled and the instant the cop got past that angle, Jeff would be silhouetted, an unmissable target.

He dropped to the base of an unseen wall and thrust against it in desperate hope that his pursuer would plunge past him in the dark. A thudding heel missed his elbow by a quarter inch and his convulsive recoil slid him into an unexpected space large enough to accept his whole lank frame.

He heard the officer's footfalls stop short just beyond, followed by a startled oath. A flashlight beam brought sharply into being alley cobbles a foot from Jeff's staring eyes. He watched the light glide toward the alley's other end, then pull back past the opening and lay a bright disk around the cop's feet before it blinked out.

The brief sweep of rays had shown Jeff what had saved him. Decades ago this house had had a porch. When Orange Street was cut through and its tenements built, the porch had been sheared away to make room for a sidewalk and a cobbled alley. Planks had been nailed over the yawning gap thus left between the ground and the horizontal joist on which the frame wall footed. Years later in all probability, some urchin had torn away the rotting bottom board for a bonfire and thus made the opening into the space in which Jeff now lay.

IT WAS quite plain that the remnant of the ancient porch jutted out above him some ten inches to form an eave that cut off upward sight. He could

see out only on his own level along a yard of cobbles, along a strip of cracked sidewalk to its curb and out to gutter asphalt beyond the curb. They, however, could not see him.

On the sidewalk the policeman's feet shifted uncertainly, betraying their owner's bewilderment. It must seem to the cop, Jeff realized, that his quarry had reached the alley mouth and then vanished into thin air.

The feet started toward the left as though it had occurred to the cop that the fugitive had dived into some doorway and crouched there. The feet stopped, turned the other way. Maybe he'd gone to the right. To search in the wrong direction would give Jeff his chance to pop out of his hiding place and escape.

Jeff Sawyer grinned bleakly, recalling Professor Turner's paradox in psychology class dim years ago. "Put a donkey between two equal haystacks equidistant from him, on a windless day, and the beast will be unable to decide to which one to go, so will starve to death."

The policeman was no donkey. His whistle shrilled in the brightening dawn, calling others to help him in his search.

When they came and found the doorways empty, they'd search the alley. They'd find this hole and Jeff would be trapped in it like the hunted rat he'd become. He must find a way out of the hole before they came.

His inward shoulder was jammed against immovable wood. Inches forward of his head, he made out the vertical cornerpost of the building's frame. He stretched his legs back as far as they would reach and found nothing.

Backward then. Jeff bridged his body between elbows and toes, was in cautious motion.

The whistle went silent, but the gray hush held a distant shout and faint, rapid footfalls. Jeff's head pulled inward from the inner end of the opening. The footfalls became louder, com-

ning fast, but Jeff had worked half an arm's length into his black burrow, would be out and gone before the new cop arrived.

His right foot struck a solid barrier back there, then his left. It was a beam. The old porch had run only this far along the side of the house.

Jeff Sawyer now knew the limits of his prison. It was narrow as a grave, low as a coffin and some ten feet long. The only escape from it was through the gap outside of which a policeman's gun waited.

The guns of two policemen. The new footfalls halted and a breathless voice gasped, "What've you got, Murtry?"

"A killer, Collins. Saw him smash in some bird's skull back through on Cherry Street. It was a mess!"

Jeff's mouth twisted. He hadn't been quite sure he'd finished Stan Corbett. The scrape of shoe leather on pavement behind him had sent him into the alley while the blow's shock still jarred up his arm from this pipe-length clenched in its fist.

He wondered if Corbett had recognized him in that last split second. It would be too bad if he had not.

"I was right back of him," Murtry was saying, "when he busted out into Orange Street here but when I got here there wasn't sound or sight of him. He must of ducked in one of them doorways."

"Not the side I come past, he didn't. There's only the pawnshop an' the Elite Liquors an' both of 'em's got iron gratings locked across their fronts. I'll take a look this other side while you cover me from here. Don't worry," Collins grunted, his voice moving away, "we've got the son penned. We'll get him, sooner or later."

PROBABLY they would. Jeff almost didn't care, now he was certain he had killed Corbett. He would not care at all if it were not for Mary.

He should have killed Mary when he had the chance, an hour ago. He should

have stepped into her bedroom from the ledge to which he'd climbed in the dark and killed Mary in her sleep, but that wasn't the way he'd planned it.

Those sleepless nights in his cell, he had planned to kill Corbett first so that Mary would know Corbett was dead. He wanted her to know who had done the deed before she herself died.

Jeff had not, in fact, been sure that he would kill her at all. Hating her as he did, he somehow had hated even more the thought of marring her silken body whose every curve was a song to tear out a man's heart—of matting with blood her midnight hair.

He hated, too, the thought of quenching forever the fires in her gray eyes. Tonight, on that ledge, he had decided it would be far better to let her live in terror, knowing Jeff Sawyer was free and on the prowl. He wanted her to see him in every shadow, hear him in every whisper of wind at her windows and in every rattle of plaster inside the walls of the house he, poor fool, had bought for her!

That had been a mistake. If he was taken now, he would himself be dead in a little while and Mary would know herself safe from him.

He must not be taken before he could get to Garden Avenue and put his hands on her white throat. . . .

Outside his hole, there was the thud of the returning Collins' feet. "No soap, Murtry," he said. "He must of slipped inside somewhere. We got to get help to look for him, but fast." Jeff heard his harsh breathing. "Yeh, hop down to the box on the corner an' call this in to the precinct. You can keep an eye this block from there while I go through an' cover Cherry Street."

"Okay!"

From where Jeff was now, he couldn't see all the way out. But he could hear Murtry's footfalls going away and he could hear Collins' feet come into the alley. He could see their shadows move across the lighted slash into the side of his black burrow.

Abruptly the shadows were motionless, blotching the light. Jeff's skin was clammy with chill sweat. He pictured Collins peering down at the gap in the wall at its base. He pictured Collins' hand easing a revolver from its holster.

The shadows of Collins' feet moved a little and then merged into the single, wider shadow of a stooping form.

Jeff's heart stalled, suddenly was racing. This wasn't disaster, it was an almost unbelievable break. He pressed against the inward joist, giving his arm room to crawl past his ear and free the bloody ten inches of lead pipe that had crushed Stan Corbett's skull.

When Collins' head poked in here, a deft blow would stupefy him. With Murtry at the corner phoning, the alley would be clear for a dash to Cherry Street and from there to Garden Avenue—and Mary.

BITS of debris sifted down as the officer balanced himself with a hand above the opening. A cry, Jeff thought, even a moan might be heard at the phone box. He dared not worry about striking only hard enough to stun. He must use all his strength.

The pipe lifted. The visor of a uniform cap poked into the hole, now the nose beneath the visor, boldly aquiline. Now! The cop's nostrils flared. "Phew," he grunted. "What an awful stink," and his head pulled back out of the opening.

Debris sifted down. The shadow split into two separate shadows that flitted away, thudding. Jeff slumped, the strength draining from him.

He was tired. He was as bone-tired as he used to be when Mary would drive him home from the hospital after a long day of operating.

She would sit behind the wheel proudly, driving her husband home. Driving home Dr. Jefferson Sawyer. She was very beautiful in her pride. "You should be wearing sables instead of that old cloth coat," Jeff would say.

"Instead of cooking and cleaning a musty furnished room, and doing our washing in the sink, you should have your own house and a dozen servants to wait on you."

"A dozen! Oh, Jeff." Her laugh would tinkle like little silver bells. "Silly." But then she'd touch his hand with a caress light as a whisper. "You'll give me all of it, darling. When you've finished your residency at the hospital. When you've built your practise."

To build that sort of a practise would take years. Jeff wanted Mary to have all those things, and more, while she still was young, while her body still was slender and her stride still jaunty and her slim hands still white and smooth. So it came about that when Stanley Corbett came to Jeff and told him how he could begin earning them for Mary far sooner than he'd thought possible, he'd listened eagerly. . . .

Into the gravelike burrow where Jeff lay came a moan that rose and fell and rose again, the heartstopping wail of a police car's siren. He hitched forward to where he could again peer out to the sidewalk, bright now with the morning.

Murtry's feet were out there again and many other feet. Now there were men's feet in scuffed shoes, a woman's feet in bedroom slippers, the frayed hem of her wrapper fluttering against bare ankles. Out there was a babble of excited questioning and the siren louder now and nearer and farther off the wail of another siren nearing fast.

From the alley's other end a third siren's howling came faintly. There was no escape now.

Here on Orange Street the siren screamed in crescendo, moaned to silence. The crowd's feet split apart like a curtain and revealed green painted car wheels at the curb. Heavy soled feet came down on the curb and a pair in thinner soled, dressier shoes. Murtry's feet joined these but the crowd's babble and the second siren, arriving, made it impossible for Jeff to hear what he said.

The siren cut off. A new voice reached Jeff, gruff, authoritative. "—seal the block. Sergeant Luccio, take five men and start combing the cellars and backyards. The hallways and roofs are your job, Abrams."

A single pair of shoes came past Jeff's hole from the direction of Cherry Street, brown shoes patterned with tiny holes, the trouser cuffs above them gray tweed. "Murtry," the voice of authority was saying, "you and Officer Ericson stay here and keep these people out of the alley, we don't want them in our hair." The brown shoes paused near the shoes that belonged to the voice of authority. "Well, Barstow," it snapped. "What's on your mind?"

"We've identified the body, captain. It's Stanley Corbett."

"Corbett, eh. Our friends on the Narcotics Squad will want to give the killer a medal."

"Yeah. They've figured for years he was the big wheel of a dope ring but they've never been able to get the goods on him."

JEFF SAWYER recalled that was how it had begun. Stanley Corbett telling him how much he could make writing narcotic prescriptions for rich addicts.

"Friends of mine, Doc. They're getting cut stuff and paying through the nose for it. With your prescriptions, they could buy it pure from a few druggists I've got lined up. And," Corbett added, lips barely moving in his sharp, shrewd face, "you'll be pulling down a hundred to a hundred and fifty a week without taking any chances."

"I'd have to have an office to make it look right," Jeff demurred. "I haven't the cash to set one up."

"Nonsense! I'm rattling around in this old house I own down on Cherry Street. Your old neighborhood. You can have the whole ground floor for the rent you and Mary pay now. I'll stake you to the equipment and you can take your sweet time paying me off."

So Jeff resigned his residency at the

hospital and they moved into the house at the other end of this alley. Mary had been like a child with a new toy, fixing up the two front rooms as waiting room and office and the two in the rear for their living.

It was only natural that they should see a lot of their upstairs neighbor, their landlord and benefactor.

In little more than a year Jeff already had paid off the money Corbett had loaned him. Mary could buy nice clothes now, and a sealskin coat, and have a woman in to do the heavy housework, but Jeff wanted much more for her. Corbett told him how he could get it. . .

"Look," Detective Barstow was saying now. "Look, skipper. Remember this doctor we sent up the river six years ago. Doctor Jefferson Sawyer. Remember the tip that fingered him for us came from Corbett."

That was no news to Jeff. It was what had brought him to the alley to wait in its black maw for Stan Corbett to come home. "Well," Barstow went on, "Sawyer was let out of the State pen yesterday noon."

The captain's feet jerked. "Good man, You've named the killer."

"Now all we've got to do is catch him. Which," Barstow said, "ain't going to be easy. He grew up right here on Orange Street. He knows every hiding hole in these tenements like I know my pockets. What's more, if these people around here can help him get away, they will. There ain't many of them don't owe Sawyer for the life of someone in the family, or maybe that one of their kids ain't growing up paralyzed or crippled. He sure used to sweat blood over any kid that was sick or hurt."

Why shouldn't Jeff have sweated over the children? Wasn't it because of a child that he'd made up his mind when he was thirteen that he was going to be a doctor and scraped and starved and studied till he'd made that come true? Because of his little sister Jen.

It was because of what had happened to Jen when she was six and Jeff thir-

teen that he'd appraised Corbett's new proposal by no other test than what it would mean to him and so to Mary. He had no obligation to his profession or to society; the debt ran the other way.

Nevertheless, he'd said. "No, Stan. It would not trouble my conscience to patch up a gunshot wound and not report it to the police, nor have I any ethical objection to remodelling the faces of men wanted by the law. But even the fees you mention would not compensate me for the consequences of being caught. I'll stay content with what I have now. I'll take no chance with a prison term."

"You're taking that chance now."

"Not as recklessly. I have an adequate defense. I am merely following my judgment in the proper treatment of patients for drug addiction."

Corbett's blond brows had arched and there had been mockery in his pale eyes. "Suppose they're proved not to be really patients? Suppose at my suggestion one of them got himself picked up as a dope peddler and made a deal for a light sentence by turning you in as his source of supply?"

Jeff was trapped. He'd been as hopelessly trapped then as he was now, lying here in this stinking hole and listening to the police captain say, "Okay, Barstow. It's going to be a tough job digging him out but we'll stay at it till we do. Come on. I want to get the squads on Cherry Street started."

NOW the thud of their feet went past Jeff's hiding place and faded. The semicircle of feet on the sidewalk broke up, there was no more excitement here and there were breakfasts to be prepared and eaten, work to go to. The strip of sidewalk emptied, but Jeff could hear a murmur of talk from where the two cops left to watch the alley mouth were hidden by the wall corner of the house across the alley.

Jeff Sawyer lay very still in the dark and the stench, thinking. Mary would be waking up now. She would be throw-

ing the sheet from her and swinging her bare feet to the floor. She'd be up by now and going to the window to close it.

Jeff remembered how he used to lie in the bed that had been warm from her body, sweet with the scent of her midnight hair, and of her breath. He would watch the sunlight strike through filmy silk and etch for him her singing curves. Lying like that one morning he had said her name and she had turned to him.

Her smile tore the heart out of him. "Go back to sleep, darling," she had murmured. "You must be dreadfully tired. You were out so late on that night call."

Where were you, Mary? The silent question had cried out within him. You weren't in the flat when I came back to get the instruments I needed to patch up Corbett's man. You weren't in the house and neither was Stanley Corbett.

Least she read the question in them, he had closed his eyes and like a dark flood his weariness and his despair had welled up into his brain and he'd found escape from them in tortured sleep.

In the filth and stink of his burrow Jeff Sawyer, ex-convict and murderer, found escape from exhaustion and despair in death-like slumber. . . .

Thirst woke him, the rasp of thirst in his throat, and the gnaw of hunger. Feet shambled past on the sidewalk, the broken shoes of the slums. A truck's enormous tires thundered by in the gutter. The shadows that slid, out there, beside the feet were small. The sun must be almost directly overhead.

The green car wheels no longer were at the curb! Jeff's pulse was a muffled drumbeat in his ears. The police had given up while he slept. They were gone. He was free.

A thick-soled shoe appeared from behind the wall corner that edged Jeff's view, its trouser cuffs bright blue. The mate appeared and the two halted, and another pair of blunt-toed shoes came from the other side of the alley mouth and stopped. The shadows of two bodies merged in a black pool.

"This is a hell of a note," Murtry's voice rumbled to Jeff, "the skipper's keeping us here on twenty-four hour duty till they dig up this Sawyer."

"If they do, pal. If they do."

"They will. They're going through the block the way my old lady used to go through my pockets Saturday nights, looking for small change."

"I don't see 'em goin' through this alley here."

"Why the blazes should they, you dumb cluck? Didn't Bart Collins poke his nose in every hole in there right after I lost sight of the son?"

"So what. I'll bet he's out of the city by now. What I mean is, he wasn't alone in this thing. Look at how he knew this Corbett would be coming past where he laid for him, an' just when."

"Easy now! He didn't need anybody to tell him Corbett's habits. Didn't he live right there in Corbett's house till he turned the back rooms into a kind of hospital and bought that house over on Garden Avenue to live in?"

The infirmary had been an excuse. Jeff had moved Mary to Garden Avenue in the hope that would break the thing growing between her and Corbett. He'd been certain that, to Mary, Corbett was only a friend, only someone pleasant to play around with in the long hours when her husband was too busy for her.

How could he think otherwise when she'd said, in the wistful tones that brought an ache to his chest, "You've given me the sables, Jeff, and the house and the servants. You've given me everything you promised but it's not worth anything because I haven't got you any more."

"So I'm off my trolley," Ericson was saying. "So how much longer do you figure we're going to have to hang around here?"

"Well, Sarge Abrams just told me in the Coffee Pot around the corner, he told me they won't be through till maybe nine, ten tonight so maybe you ought to quit stalling and take your lunch break."

"Twenty minutes," Ericson grumbled. "Big-hearted the skipper is. Twenty minute break after we been on our feet twelve hours. Okay, I'll be seein' you."

His feet went out of sight in the direction Murtry's had come and then Murtry's were hidden by the wall corner on the alley mouth's other side. Only his feet. His shadow lay on the sidewalk at the wall's edge and Jeff knew he'd gone only far enough to lean his back against the wall.

Let him stay. He and the rest of the police would be gone by ten and it would be dark then. Jeff could endure the stench, he could endure hunger and thirst for another ten hours now he knew that when they had passed he would be free to find Mary and kill her.

MARY must have heard about Corbett by now. Fear must be alive in her as it had lived in Jeff those last days, the growing fear of Stanley Corbett that overshadowed even his hate of Corbett.

The men whose wounds he tended behind drawn shades, with lookouts at the door, had told him about Corbett. The hard and ruthless man who lay in the back room of the house on Cherry Street, breath whistling through tiny tubes jutting out of a head faceless with bandages, had told Jeff what Corbett was.

The woman to whom Corbett sent him one night told him what Corbett could do to a woman when he tired of her. It was fear for Mary that clawed him when he stumbled into the foyer of the Garden Avenue house the dawn after the woman died and he saw Corbett's glove on the floor just inside the door.

The glove was gone when he came down to the meal that was his breakfast and Mary's lunch. Over coffee he had said, "I've made a decision, my dear. I'm going to close up the office and my practise. We'll sell this house and buy one in the country somewhere. I'll take care of the farmers' wives and their children and I'll have the time to be a husband again to you."

The gray fire sprang into Mary's eyes, shining. "That's wonderful, Jeff! It's the most marvelous gift you've ever given me or ever could. . . ."

Before Jeff could nerve himself to tell Corbett of his decision, the police had walked in on him and caught him removing bandages from the head of a man wanted by the law in seven states. . . .

The shadows were a little longer on the cracked sidewalk. Somewhere out there tiny bells tinkled. The thirst was fire now in Jeff Sawyer's throat, fire running through his veins. A vise squeezed his skull as it had when they brought the assistant district attorney to him in his cell.

The lawyer had merely smiled at Jeff's denunciation of Stanley Corbett. "It doesn't make sense, doctor. If what you say is the truth, why should Mr. Corbett have gone to the police with his suspicions of what you were up to in that little private infirmary?"

WHY, indeed, unless Corbett already knew of Jeff's decision to break with him and take Mary out of his reach? Jeff had told no one of that decision save Mary herself.

The tinkle of bells that came into Jeff's gravelike burrow was like Mary's silvery laugh. How she must have laughed at him, how she and Stan Corbett must have laughed at him all those dreary nights when he'd been about Corbett's business.

She would not laugh tonight, when Jeff came to her.

Small feet scampered past on the sidewalk, the feet of children running to the ice cream wagon's tinkling bells, pennies clapped in their sweaty little hands. Jeff had pennies in his pocket. He had ten dollars in his pocket. Ten dollars would buy a lot of ice cream to ease his burning thirst, to cool his fever and still his hunger.

On the sidewalk Patrolman Murtry's shadow lay, waiting for Jeff Sawyer to show himself.

LONG ago, when Jeff was thirteen, he'd had five pennies earned running an errand. The ice cream wagon had come tinkling its bells all up and down Orange Street but Jeff hadn't bought ice cream with his pennies. He'd bought a ball for Jen, for his gray eyed, black haired little sister, and Jen had bounced the ball along the sidewalk, counting the bounces with some childish chant. The ball took a bad bounce out into the gutter and Jen darted out into the gutter after it.

Jeff remembered Jen's scream when the truck hit her. And her dreadful silence afterward.

They let Jeff ride on the ambulance and when they got to the hospital they told him Jen still was alive. Jeff waited. He waited hours, years, in the hard whiteness, the stomach-turning smells of the hospital and at last an interne came to him and had said:

"She's pretty badly smashed up, son. There's one surgeon in the city who might be able to save her but," the young doctor in white told Jeff bitterly, "he's not on our staff."

"What's the difference? Get him to come here and save Jen."

"We can't, sonny. It's against the rules for a surgeon to operate in a hospital if he isn't on its staff." And then, the interne's realization that he was speaking out of turn obvious even to the tortured boy. "We've got good surgeons on our staff too and they're doing their best. Maybe they'll be able to save your sister."

The surgeons had done their best but Jen had died. That was when Jeff had decided that he was going to be a doctor when he grew up. A children's doctor and the best one there ever was, so much the best that he'd be able to insist on changing the rule which, he was to learn, is enforced in almost every first class hospital the country over.

He was to learn the good and sufficient reasons for that rule but they never would quite make sense to him. . . .

The bells tinkled merrily, going away.

Carrying away the ice cream that could quench Jeff's maddening thirst. The cold, wet— He made himself think about something else. He made himself try to remember what Jen had chanted as she bounced her ball.

"B," a piping treble came to him, "my name is Bertha." That was it! "My husband's name is Bobby." That was what Jen had chanted as she bounced the ball Jeff bought for her. "We come from Boston," he heard as the little girl's voice came nearer, "and we sell baked beans."

They never change, the children's games and what the children chant as they play them.

"C." He could hear the ball's thump on the sidewalk now. "My name is Celia." Thump. The idea was to go all through the alphabet without missing. "My husband's name is Charley." Jeff saw the ball thump the sidewalk just this side of the wall corner and flash up again. "We come from Carolina." He saw small red slippers come into sight,

their heels slant worn. "And we sell cherries."

Thump. The ball bounced up and the little feet took another step. "D." Thump. "My name is—" The ball hit a small red toe and glanced off toward the curb and beyond the curb there was the thunder of an oncoming truck.

Jeff's throat locked on breath as the ball went over the curb and the little feet turned to dart after it. A yell broke through Jeff Sawyer's throat lock, "No!" He shoved out of his hole yelling, "The truck, Jen. The truck!" and a blue shape lurched into the alley mouth.

Jeff was on his feet, his cry caught in his larynx as he saw the little girl stock-still at the curb, her shining curls golden in the sun, not midnight black like Jen's. Like Mary's. His hand flung out, pointing the blood crusted pipe length at the huge truck that thundered harmlessly past.

The truck's thunder blotted out the bing of Patrolman Murtry's gun!



NEXT ISSUE'S **4** BIG NOVELETS

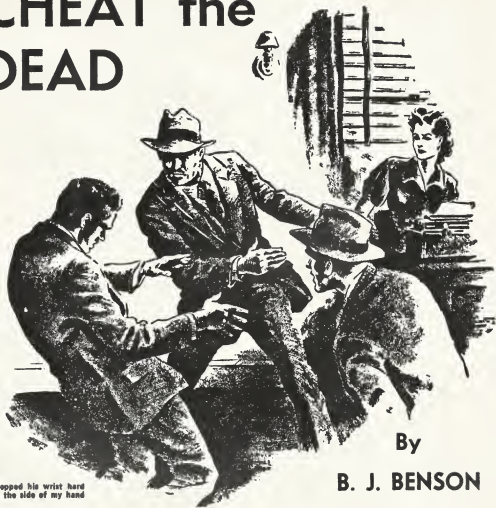
IN AT THE KILL by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

THE TIME WILL COME by FRANCES BECK

THE MURDEROUS DEB by BENTON BRADEN

NO MAN WALKS ALONE by GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

CHEAT the DEAD



I chopped his wrist hard
with the side of my hand

By

B. J. BENSON

*Although Max Pebble was no tree-climber, he could see
through the foliage that obscured the Hayden killing!*

I'M GLAD you're back," Chief Hinkey said as I sat down. "You know why, don't you, Max? A whole week's gone by and we've got nothing."

"What's that?" I asked. "The Hayden case?"

"Yes. So you've heard about it, too."

"I read about it on my vacation," I told him.

"Sure you read about it," he growled. "The papers are giving it plenty of cov-

erage. Having a field day. The city council is issuing statements denying a crime wave. Everybody wants to get into the act."

"Yes, that usually happens."

"What do you think, Max?" He sounded worried.

"Only what I read in the papers," I said. "This Hayden's house gets robbed. His wife gets killed, and Hayden himself gets shot and almost

dies. The killer drops the loot on the getaway. Seems to me it was all for nothing."

"Yes. And it looks like we've got nothing, too." He reached short, stubby fingers into the top drawer of his big desk, and taking out a couple of cigars, handed one to me. I sniffed at it and lighted it with the desk lighter. I took a slow drag. It was a good cigar, the kind I couldn't afford.

"I want you to take over, of course," the chief said, rolling his cigar in his fingers. "I want it cleaned up quick, Max. This thing happened over in the Park Ridge section. You know how those folks are. They pay a lot of taxes and they have a lot of friends over there." He jerked his thumb at the window, to the City Hall across the street. "The mayor was just in and he laid it on the line."

"That Park Ridge precinct is a good station," I said. "Cannavo working on it?"

"Yes. I've called him and told him you were coming over."

"All right," I said, getting up. "I'll go right to work on it."

"Good," he said. "Good. Say, I didn't even ask you yet. Have a good vacation?"

"Fine."

"How's Ellie?"

"Fine. Still complaining about my late hours and cold suppers."

"Still doing it." He sighed. "She knew that twenty years ago when she married a cop."

"Yes," I said. "But that was twenty years ago. You know women."

THEN I left the chief's office and went out to the back of Police Headquarters where the garage was. I got myself a black radio coupe and drove out to Park Ridge. It was half past nine in the morning.

The Park Ridge precinct station was on Vista Boulevard and across from the new limestone district courthouse. I pulled up at the curb and went in between the twin blue lamps. The sergeant at the desk was a guy named Peabody. He waved his hand and I waved back. I went up the wooden stairs to the detectives' office. Cannavo was

waiting for me, a big grin on his lean, tanned face. He was a tall, good-looking kid and had come up fast in the department because he had an uncanny eye for details and was the kind of cop who went out and worked when he had a job to do.

"The Chief can't get me mad, Lieutenant," he said as he put out his hand. "I'm one fellow who needs some help. The newspapers haven't been kind."

"So I've been reading, Lieutenant." I grinned back as I shook his hand.

"Look, Max, this thing has so many angles it'll take months to get on the fairway. Then we'll both need a vacation."

"There's a lot of noise downtown, Tony. You know how it is with a new administration. They want fast action. Suppose you tell me about it on the way to the Hayden house. I've got a car outside."

He slapped a hat on his black wavy hair and put on his trenchcoat. I looked at his tall frame and big shoulders.

"The only guy on the force who looks like a detective," I said.

"Sure," he said, swinging at me playfully. "Look at you. The only cop in the city who looks like the president of the First National Bank."

"That's on account of my white hair," I said. "I've got worries."

"Don't give me that stuff," he said as we went out. "It's all got to do with your pigment. You're getting old, Max."

He gave me the address, and I headed the car into a small stream of traffic. The day was warm and the bright sun glinted off the car hood. Cannavo slouched down beside me and stretched his long legs.

"The call," he said, "came into the station last Thursday night at ten o'clock. Ten-three to be exact. Somebody driving by heard the shooting and pulled in the police box at the corner of Charlesgate and Terrace. When the radio car got to the Hayden house it was ten-eight. They stayed there and radioed in for the works. That's when I showed up."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hayden were both in the living room. She was lying across the sofa with a bullet through the temple. Killed instantly. Hayden had

crawled all over, and the place was slippery with blood. He was lying half in the living room and half in the hallway. He was almost dead. I guess he passed out before he had a chance to use the telephone in the hall."

"How's he now?"

"He'll live. He was lucky. Got it in the chest. An inch more and it would have been all over for him. He's at the Southridge Memorial Hospital. We can talk to him whenever you want."

"Later," I said. "What else did you find?"

He took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one. I shook my head. He lit up. "Take a left turn here," he said. I made the turn.

"Well," he continued. "We waited until the medical examiner and the lab men gave us the all clear and we began to poke around. Sanders was down from Headquarters. He was a lot of help to me."

"Sanders is a good boy," I agreed.

"We found the living room window half open, and the screen was up. There were a lot of tracks in the flower bed underneath it. But they were all messed up, and we couldn't get a moulage of any kind. Then we began to find stuff on the lawn."

"The loot?"

"Yes. Sterling pieces. A diamond ring. A pendant. Hayden's wallet."

"No prints on the stuff, I suppose?"

"No."

"No prints in the house?"

"Covered it from top to bottom. Just the Haydens," Cannavo said.

"Nobody saw anything? Neighbors—anybody?"

"Nothing."

"No car drove up or away?"

"Nobody heard or saw any."

"What does Hayden do?" I asked.

"Owns a small manufacturing business. Hardware fittings."

"How are his finances?"

"Good."

"Any enemies?"

"Now you're talking, Max," Tony winked. "Hayden had a girl friend. The girl friend had a boy friend."

"I see. One of those things. You've kept that part out of the papers."

"Yes. It's the only thing we have

to work with."

"The Haydens have any kids?"

CANNAVO shook his head. "No. Maybe it was a good thing with Hayden cheating like that."

"He can't cheat on her now," I said. "One more thing, Tony. Any powder burns on Hayden or his wife?"

"I know what you're thinking, Max. Yes. Mrs. Hayden had burns on the temple. The muzzle was held to her head."

"And Hayden?"

"No. Not a burn. He was shot from a distance."

"You take paraffin tests of his hands?"

"Yes. At the hospital. Nothing showed."

"And no gun around?"

"No gun. The slugs were from a thirty-eight."

"I guess that's enough right now. Hold the rest of it until later."

He tapped his breast pocket. "I've got it all here. Pages of it."

The Hayden house, which sat at the end of a long parkway in the fashionable section of Park Ridge, was English Tudor, with antique brick. A macadam drive arched up from the street and back.

We got out of the car at the front of the house and went up the short flagstone walk. I leaned on the ornamental wrought iron railing as Cannavo fitted a key to the lock.

"Nice house," I said.

"Sure is," he said, "but I like them modern."

He swung the door open and we went in. My nostrils twitched. There was a stale, musty smell inside. Cannavo led me into the darkened living room and pulled up one of the window shades. The room was filled with good period pieces and had been cleaned, except for the dark stains which were streaked over the green damask covering of the sofa and the oriental design of the rug.

"Mrs. Hayden was lying there," Cannavo said, nodding at the sofa. "Hayden was halfway out of the living room. The telephone is in the hall. You can see the stains from the trail he made."

"There are stains all over the rug,"

I said. I went over to the window and unlatched it. I looked down at the floor. "Even around here. He must have bled pretty bad."

"He did."

I slid the window up and looked out into some tree branches.

"It's only a three-foot drop to the ground," I said. "Did Hayden say that the killer went out this way?"

"Hayden says he doesn't know. He passed out. I myself don't think so. The window was only open six or eight inches."

I nodded and examined the window ledge. There were two long, narrow, twisted nails half embedded in the wood.

"What do you make of those?" Cannavo asked, coming over. "Hayden told me they were from an old radio aerial they had."

"They look fresh," I said. "Let's go."

We went outside. I turned and walked along outside the living room windows and past the broken flower bed. There was a dogwood tree whose branches scraped the window glass. I stood under the tree and looked into the living room. Then I turned to Cannavo.

"Where was the loot?"

"About ten feet from the window. The stuff was scattered all over the grass."

"Anything missing?"

"Hayden doesn't know for sure."

"Okay, let's go see Hayden."

The Southridge Memorial Hospital was on a high hill overlooking the river. Modern. All glass and stainless steel. We rose up noiselessly in the elevator and walked noiselessly down a corridor to the nurse's desk.

The nurse was young and pretty and she had a full red mouth. When she saw Cannavo approaching, she straightened her white starched cap and smoothed her lipstick.

"Lieutenant Cannavo," she said severely, "haven't you anything better to do than come around and bother poor Mr. Hayden?"

"Miss Doyle," he said, sweeping off his hat. "You're as beautiful as ever. Don't you know I really came to see you? There's no other way. You won't go out with me.".....

"Why, you never asked me," she pouted.

"I will," he said solemnly, "as soon as I get a night off." He nodded his head to me. "Now I have to take my grandfather in to see Mr. Hayden. My grandfather is just down from his farm. He's never been to the city before. He almost jumped out of the elevator."

I snorted as she giggled. We went by her and into Hayden's room.

FREDERICK HAYDEN was propped up on two pillows. He'd been a handsome man in his younger days. Now his face was flabby and pale with large sacs of flesh pouching on either side of his chin. He had small ears and thin steel-gray hair. He looked to be in his middle fifties.

He was holding a book with one hand. The other was bound up inside his pajama coat. He put the book down as we came in.

"How are you feeling, Mr. Hayden?" asked Cannavo.

"A little better, Lieutenant," Hayden said. "Thank goodness they're through with the transfusions."

"That's good," Cannavo said. "This is Lieutenant Max Pebble from the Homicide Bureau."

"I've heard of Lieutenant Pebble," said Hayden.

"I've gotten on this kind of late," I said. "I was wondering if you'd go over things again with me."

"Fire away," Hayden said. "I'm very anxious to see that my wife's murderer is brought to justice."

"You can tell me what you remember about last Thursday night."

"As I remember," he said, "Grace and I were sitting in the living room. I know it was just after ten because the radio program had just changed. I heard a step in the hall and looked up. There was a man standing in the entrance to the living room. He was wearing a black stocking over his head with two slits where the eyes were. Grace screamed and I started to get up. The man had a revolver in his hand and as I started toward him, he fired at me. I felt the impact of the bullet and I remember falling forward as I blacked out."

"When I came to, probably seconds later, the first thing I did was look over to the divan. Grace was slumped over—shot—dead. I was bleeding badly but I managed to crawl to the window to call for help. But my voice was only a weak croak. I crawled across the rug to the hall where the telephone was. I blacked out again before I made it. I woke up here in the hospital."

"Is your memory any better as far as a description of the man is concerned?" Cannavo asked.

"No. I told you before. It happened so fast I couldn't get a definite impression. All I know is that he wasn't abnormally tall or short or fat or thin."

"That's something," Cannavo grinned. "At least the guy wasn't a monstrosity."

"This is no time for levity," Hayden said angrily. "My wife's killer is running around loose. What have you done about it, Lieutenant? Or do I have to call the mayor for satisfaction?"

"With what Lieutenant Cannavo has had to work with," I said, "he's done a lot. Thank you, Mr. Hayden."

I nodded to Cannavo and we got out of there.

The Maison d'Or was a swank women's shop. The doorman frowned as he held the door open for us to enter. We walked across the deep pile of the broadloom carpeting, with me looking uncomfortably at my wide black police brogans. A tall hatchet-faced woman in a long black gown came over to us. Cannavo spoke to her as we both took off our hats. She took us to a small office. There was a white circular desk and three stiff spindle-legged chairs. We sat down. She went out and closed the door with a bang. Cannavo looked around at the expensive furnishings and whistled softly.

We waited. The door opened and a girl came in. She was wearing a blue silk robe, and her blond hair was cut short. She was slim and pretty, with a small tilted nose, a pert, rounded face and large brown, animated eyes. But her mouth was just a trifle too thin and too hard. She looked at Cannavo and her mouth tightened. We both stood up. She tightened the robe around her. Cannavo motioned to his chair.

"Please, sit down, Miss Calvert," he said. "Lieutenant Pebble is from the Homicide Bureau and he'd like to ask some questions."

Her eyes flamed at us as she stamped her small foot.

"I'm sick of these questions and I'm sick of you coming here where I work. If there is any continuance of it, my employer is going to call City Hall."

"Everybody is calling City Hall," I said wearily.

"You can't come barging in here to ask me a lot of silly questions," she said. "I won't have it."

"A woman has been murdered," I said mildly.

"A woman has been murdered. The price of rice in China is going up. The wool buyers in Afghanistan have a market slump on their hands. What has it got to do with me?"

"You were friendly with Mr. Hayden," I said. "Mr. Hayden was a married man."

"So what? Do you have to persecute me because of it? What has all that got to do with an armed robbery?"

"It might not have been an armed robbery."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean in a case like this we have to dig pretty deep. Mr. Cannavo has been doing some digging. He's found some unpleasant things. He's found that Hayden was cheating on his wife. That you frequented certain hotels, restaurants and night clubs with him. That he gave you presents. We also found out from Mrs. Hayden's relatives that he'd discussed divorce with her. She refused to hear of it. Do you know what we're thinking now?"

THE starch went out of her and she sagged forward in the chair.

"Yes," she whispered, burying her face in her hands.

"Did you promise to marry him if he got rid of his wife?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said brokenly. "I might have said it. He was so persistent, so lavish with his gifts and entertainment. I was dazzled."

"How did you meet him?"

"He came here to the shop with his wife about six months ago. I modeled

a gown for Mrs. Hayden. He came back alone the next day. We went to lunch. That's the way it started."

"Did Andrew Carlisle know about it?" Cannavo asked.

Her eyes widened as she looked up. "How did you know about him?"

"We know," Cannavo said.

"Andrew doesn't know a thing about this," she said earnestly. "I swear. He doesn't even know I was seeing Hayden."

"You were engaged to Carlisle," I said. "You ran around with Hayden. You were playing both ends of it."

"A girl likes a good time," she said defiantly. "Andy Carlisle isn't making any kind of money yet. He's only a young architect."

"Yet you're engaged to marry him. Doesn't that mean anything any more?"

"Yes," she said. "We love each other."

"And if Carlisle found out what you were doing," I said, "he'd get pretty mad. Mad enough to kill somebody."

"He couldn't know. Not Andy. I was so careful. You can't think Andy had anything to do with it."

"We haven't talked to him yet," I said.

"You're not going to him? You're not going to tell him everything?"

"There's no choice," I said.

"It will ruin everything," she whimpered.

"Yes," I said. "It's funny you didn't think of how you were ruining things for Mrs. Hayden. She seems to have been a pretty nice person. By the way, where were you that night?"

"Thursday night? Why—I was home. I told that to Lieutenant Cannavo when he was here before."

"There's no proof," I said. "Your roommate was out."

"I was there," she said, half-crying. "You must believe me."

"Why should we?" I said. I turned to Cannavo. "Let's go, Tony."

I waited while Cannavo went over to the desk and spoke to the black-haired receptionist. He came back and nodded. We sat down on the leather settee.

The man who came out to see us was big and young and clean cut. He had a dent across the bridge of his nose and looked like he had seen some line work in college football. He wore a short crew haircut and a blue, pencil-striped suit.

Cannavo got up and showed him his leather folder. Carlisle looked at him and then at me. His brows knitted together.

I got up and went over to him. "Ever hear of Frederick Hayden?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "In the papers. He's the man whose wife was killed in that robbery, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Never heard of him before?"

"I don't think so," he said slowly. "It doesn't ring any bells."

"You're engaged to Miss Calvert? Miss Audrey Calvert?" I asked.

"Sure. What's that got to do with it?"

"Did you know that Miss Calvert was friendly with Hayden?"

He took a step closer to me and flexed his fingers. "What do you mean by friendly?" he growled.

"You know what I mean," I said.

He reached up and grabbed me by my coat lapels.

"I don't care how many badges you carry, mister," he said. "You'll take that back."

I chopped his wrist hard with the side of my hand. His arm dropped away quickly and he began to massage it vigorously.

"I don't like to have people put their hands on me," I said gently. "I don't do it myself."

"Sorry," he said wryly. "I guess I lost my head for a moment. You can see how I feel about Audrey. But it's not true. She wouldn't be like that with a married man. Not her."

"She was," I said. "You can take it up with her later. All I'm interested in is whether you knew about it."

"No. I didn't."

"Then I'm sorry you had to hear about it this way. Where were you the

ON THE Mercantile Building, where we went next, was a sign that said ARCHIBALD AND ARCHIBALD, ARCHITECTS. The offices were on the fifth floor. When we got up there we pushed open the frosted glass door and went

night of the robbery?"

"What night was that?" he asked, still rubbing his wrist.

"Last Thursday."

"I—I don't recall offhand."

"Think about it."

"Let's see. Friday night I saw Audrey. Now I remember. She was upset about something. The night before that I went to a movie."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Anybody you know that saw you?"

"I don't know," he said dazedly.

"Thanks," I said. "That's all for now, Mr. Carlisle."

He didn't hear me. He was looking off into space.

"She was upset," he said slowly to himself.

The sun was deep in the west when we drove back to Park Ridge and pulled up before the front door of the Hayden house.

"There's no other way, Tony," I said. "It's got to be here."

"Well, I agree with you," he said. "You know that, Max. But we checked the house from top to bottom."

"It's got to be around the living room or the hall," I said.

He opened the front door and we went into the hallway. I picked up the telephone table and examined it.

"We checked that last week," Cannavo said.

I went into the living room and looked around for a moment. Going over to the fireplace I began tapping the bricks.

"We went over the whole place with a detector," Cannavo said.

"The furniture? Floor? Walls? Mold-ing? Windows?"

"Everything."

"It's got to be here," I said stubbornly.

I went over to the window, unlatched and opened it. I poked my head out.

"Did you check the flower bed?" I asked.

"Every inch of it," he said.

I looked at the dogwood tree in front of me. My eyes started at the base of the trunk and went slowly up over the long sinuous branches.

Cannavo came over to me. I squinted up among the leaves. Then I pointed.

"We've found it," I said.

"Where?" Cannavo leaned out and looked up.

"Up there. See that green canvas sack tied to a branch near the top?"

"I see it," he said.

HE HOPPED out of the window and started to climb the tree. When he reached the branch he took out his jack-knife and hacked it off. I was climbing out the window after him as he threw the branch down, and it thudded to the ground at my feet. I loosened the draw-string of the canvas bag and looked inside. Cannavo came down and wiped the bark from his hands.

"Well?" he said.

"Take a look."

He peered in. "That's it," he said. "A thirty-eight caliber pistol."

"That's what we've been looking for," I said.

"You're a stubborn old coot, Max," he grinned.

"It had to figure," I said. "The gun had to be here."

They were wheeling the supper trays away from the rooms on the fourth floor of the Southridge Memorial Hospital. We went into Hayden's room. He was smoking a cigarette.

"Come in," he said cheerfully. "I hope you have news."

"We have," I said.

"Good. Did you track the man down?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. Where is he?"

"Right here, Hayden."

"Here?"

"That's right, Hayden. We found your gun and know how you did it."

"Why—why that's preposterous."

"I know," I said. "You're going to call City Hall and raise a ruckus. We've saved you the trouble. The D. A. will be in to see you personally."

He stared at the tip of his cigarette and the color flushed up over his puffy face.

"You're making a stupid mistake," he finally said.

"No. No mistake," I said. "It's shut and closed. You were cheating on your wife. Yes, we found out about that."

(Continued on page 125)

Three Dead Men

a novelet by ROGER TORREY

CHAPTER I

JUDAS PINCH

THE BAR was almost deserted when I came from the back room, with only one boiled customer and one bored bartender in it. The customer was Steve Kovacs and the barman, Henry Gillis. Steve had a small logging contract which probably made him about as much money as Henry dragged down in wages. And Steve, who was one of the few Hungarians in that part of the

country, had been all over the world and liked to talk about it.

Henry had been tending bar for thirty years and had never crossed the county line. They got along just fine together, because Steve thought Henry was stupid for staying in one place all his life, while Henry thought Steve was a fool because he didn't stay in one place and get acquainted with the neighbors for a

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The slug hit both the gun and Henry's hand



*Joe Walters finds his man and the missing money—
but he can't find anyone to pin the rap on!*

hundred miles around. They argued it all the time.

Steve was in the middle of the bar, all sprawled out, with his elbows wide and chin almost on the bar, so I stopped at the end of the plank. Steve stared at me for at least ten seconds before I registered on him. Then he waved a hand toward me.

"Hi, Joe!" he said. "You have drink with me?"

I had stopped with the idea of having a quick one and then home and to bed. I had been in the game since three that afternoon, and ten hours of tough poker playing is wearing.

Henry set up the bottle and the plain-water chaser without being told, and Steve waved a hand at me again.

"You come here, hey, Joe?" he said. "You have drink with me, yes?"

I poured out a drink and held it up and nodded to Steve. There was no point in going down the bar where he was. I don't like being mauled around by a stew unless I'm one myself, and Steve, very plainly, was in the arm-across-the-shoulder mood.

"He's been on it three days, now," Henry said. "He's waiting for some friend of his that's just come over from the old country. He's going to work for Steve, I guess. Steve's been waiting for him since seven."

"Steve's a good boy," I said. "He tried to sit in the game, but Fales wouldn't let him light. He had too much. About ten, that was."

HENRY sighed and went back to Steve and poured out a drink for both of them. If Steve had tried to pour his own he would have spilled it all over the bar, and Henry was a careful man with the owner's stock.

So we all held up glasses and nodded and smiled and drank. I nodded at Henry, who poured another one for the two of them, and then drifted back to me carrying his glass. He nodded toward the back.

"Looked pretty steep," he said.

"How'd you come out?"

I had lost a hundred and forty dollars and said so. I'd been losing steadily for about three weeks and it about had me down. Any time I'd get a good hand I wouldn't get a play on it, and every time I'd get a fair one I'd find it beaten. I'd win a pot now and then, of course, but the percentage was going downhill with me all the time.

"Steve's a rotten poker player when he's sober and he's worse when he's tight," I said. "Fales did right in keeping him out. There's a bunch of sharpshooters in there that would put their hands in your pockets if they couldn't rob you any other way. I've been finding it out."

About then we took the second drink and I paid for it—and about then in came the night cop. A bird named Sol Dickie. Just a big country kid who had a gun and a sap and who didn't have the faintest idea of what either of them was for.

He came dashing in, put on the brakes when he saw Steve at the bar, and then hauled out his gun. A man could have walked from the bar to the door while he was getting it out. He pointed the cannon at Steve.

"C-come along," he got out.

Steve had heard him come in and had wobbled around on his seat to see who it was. He saw the gun was headed in his direction.

"Hey!" he said. "You be careful!"

Dickie tried to look like a policeman about to make an arrest, and didn't do well at it. He went a little closer to Steve, acting as though he was easing up to a cornered wildcat.

"Come along," he said again. "Don't make a move!"

I laughed and Henry laughed. Steve gave us a puzzled look and then laughed because we were doing it.

"Put away the gun—you don't need it," I said to Dickie. "Since when are they picking up drunks in this town? You're going to need a bigger jail to hold everybody from the mayor on

down, aren't you, Sol?"

He quit pointing the gun at Steve, but he didn't put it away.

"I ain't picking him up for being drunk, Joe," he said. "He's killed a guy, that's what he's done. He beat him to death with a jack!"

"You gone crazy, Sol?" Henry Gillis asked. "You must've."

"The fella's out in the car," Sol said. "In Steve's own car. His head is all beat in with a jack. Steve must've had a flat and just left the jack out on the floor boards, and he must've picked it up and started to swing with it. The guy's deader than the Unknown Soldier!"

STEVE had stopped laughing when Henry and I had. He was staring at Dickie but he wasn't understanding what Dickie was saying. Henry's mouth was open and he was looking as though he didn't believe what he had heard.

"This jack's a big old thing, with a square base," Sol went on. "It must weigh ten pounds or more. Every time the guy was hit, one of those corners must've gone in. His head's spread all over the front seat of the car. You should see it! I guess I'd better not move the car until the coroner gets here."

"I guess you'd better not," I said. "What makes you think Steve did all this?"

"The dead man is the one that was going to work for Steve. He just come here from Europe, some place. He got in town yesterday, but Steve, here, wouldn't get off his bust and take him to camp."

"I got the doctor and the doctor said he'd been dead about three hours, and Steve was talking to him about nine o'clock. Couple of fellas saw him talking to him. Besides, Steve's the only one this guy knew in town. He just got here yesterday."

"You talk about what?" Steve said. "What's the matter with you? You crazy?"

"Look, Steve," I said. "I'm a friend

of yours, ain't I?"

"You my friend, Joe."

"Then come on and take a walk with me."

"Sure, Joe. I go. Where we go?"

I winked at Dickie and he got the idea. He put his gun where it belonged and went out ahead, starting for the jailhouse, and Steve and I followed. Steve was wobbling all over the street.

"What you been doing tonight, Steve," I asked, "besides drinking up all the drinking liquor in town?"

He said he'd been doing just that—that as soon as his friend from the old country came along, he was going to camp.

I asked him where he'd been around nine o'clock.

"Drinking," he said, and waved his hand. "I drink because I have to go to camp and I not drink there. It is my camp and it does not do to drink where the men are hired."

He wasn't stalling, I was sure of that. He just didn't remember. About that time we got to the door of the jailhouse, which Sol had left invitingly open, and in we went. Steve didn't even hesitate. He was so tight he didn't have any idea of where he was.

Sol motioned toward the last of the three cells from where he was standing, and I walked Steve right into it and Sol slammed the door.

"Go to sleep, fella," I said to Steve. "I'll see you in the morning."

He held onto the bars of the cell and then suddenly realized what they were and where he was.

"Joe!" he cried out. "You! My friend!"

I felt like Judas, but it was better than having the big kid cop lose his head and start work with the sap, which is what he'd have done. He'd think he was dealing with a murderer and he wouldn't take any chances. We went out and Sol shook his head.

"I'd never have believed it of Steve," he said.

"I don't now," I told him.

"He must've done it."

"Well, you're the cop, you should know," I said, and went back and said goodnight to Henry Gillis.

I knew Henry would be glad to hear that Steve had ended up in jail without having his face all marked up with the sap.

CHAPTER II

SELF-DEFENSE



I HAD been in Ellerville about a month by then, looking for a man named Schuyler. George Schuyler. At least, that had been his name seven years before, when he had taken forty-eight thousand dollars from the bank he worked for and skipped out with it. The bonding house I work for had trailed him for awhile, but he got clear away and for five years we had let it rest.

But a month ago we had received a letter from a girl he'd run around with while he was in the bank, and she told us she'd heard from him and that the letter had been mailed from Ellerville. He didn't want an answer, he said, but just couldn't help writing her. He said he was going under another name and was living honestly, and that when he was able he was going to pay to the bank the money he'd stolen—and the rest of the line that went with it.

That's common. It's hard for a man to forget everything in the past. They'll write letters like that and visit the old home-town and telephone long-distance a surprising amount of times. Of course, lots of times it's when they are drinking and Old Man Remorse is walking hand and hand with them. And lots of times they really mean it—but they never do it.

I had a poor snapshot of Schuyler taken some time before he skipped, a general description of him that didn't necessarily mean a thing, and that was all. And a man can change a lot in seven

years, particularly if he's a fugitive from justice.

I figured my best bet was to hang around town and wait for him to come to me, so I spent the time loafing around in bars and in playing cards when I could find a decent game. I'd be a lot more likely to run into him in such places than I would around the church crowd. I like to hang around them anyway, so I was combining business with pleasure and nobody was hurt.

Besides, I'd have to get acquainted with the man before I could put my finger on him and say, "I want you, Schuyler." And there's no easier place in the world to get acquainted than in a saloon. The man would be going under a different name, would be altered physically and mentally, and I had to be sure. Then, too, I knew he wouldn't be inhibited.

The only thing in my favor was the size of the town. There weren't more than fifteen hundred people in it, and they all made a living from the mills and logging camps around. All I had to do was watch them, and the loggers when they came to town to spend their money.

I was staying at the best hotel, which would have classed as a rooming house in a town any bigger. It was clean, but that was about all you could say for it. Just a cubbyhole in a corridor with a washbowl in it. The bathroom was two doors down the hall.

You don't usually look for trouble in a bathroom and I had no reason to expect any, so I don't figure I was to blame for walking in on it in my shirtsleeves.

I'd taken off my shirt, shoes, and gun, even my undershirt. I was lugging a pair of pajamas and all I was thinking about was the shower I was going to take. So when I opened the bathroom door and a guy with a handkerchief over his mouth and nose stuck a gun at me, I was in no shape to argue.

"Inside here!" he said. "Out of the hall!"

I went inside, holding my hands up

at shoulder height. I didn't drop the pajamas because there was no sense in dropping them on a dirty floor, and they were the last clean pair I had left until the laundry got back.

"What did Steve Kovacs have to say, huh?" the man said.

"He was too far gone to talk," I said, and tried to figure what was holding me up.

HE WAS dressed like a lumberjack, with pitch-crusted denim overall pants and a blue cotton work shirt. His logging boots looked as if they'd seen a lot of service. His hat looked okay, too—all battered and out of shape, but with a sort of reckless tilt to it.

But his hands were smooth and clean instead of calloused, and he didn't talk like a logger. He had just the trace of an accent, but I couldn't figure what it was.

"What was the idea of helping the cop take him in?" he said. "You a policeman?"

"Steve's a friend of mine," I said. "I figured the cop might go whacky and start sapping him all over the place. The cop's just a kid and he was scared of Steve and I figured he might blow his cork and start kicking Steve all over the place. Steve's so plastered he wouldn't know what the cop was trying to get him to do."

"Your name's Walters, eh?"

"That's right."

"What d'you do?" he asked.

"Play a little cards."

"Crossroader, eh?"

"Well, yes."

A crossroader is a gambler who plays in one town for awhile, then hears of a big game somewhere else and goes there. They'll jump five hundred miles to sit in one all-night game, if it's steep enough to warrant it. In other words, a professional gambler who's not working for the house.

The man with the gun looked me over, not missing a thing.

"You don't look like one," he said.

"You look like a wrestler."

"Too hard on the ears," I said.

"So you're not a wrestler, eh?" he said, and laughed. "Well, you're not a crossroader, either. You've been losing too steady. You're nothing but a damn liar!"

With that, he took a step forward and made a pass at me with the gun.

I'd lied to him both ways. I wasn't a gambler, and I had wrestled quite a bit. Amateur stuff, but there's a lot of good wrestling done among the amateurs, because they're leveling instead of doing the circus tricks. So when the gun came down I stooped fast and took the blow on the big shoulder muscles, and I got my arms around his middle before he could get away.

And that's where the pajamas wrecked us both. Instead of being able to grip one hand in the other, I had to get my right wrist with my left hand in order to get a hold. I still had the pajamas in my hand and I couldn't get them out of the way.

That extra four inches cinched his stomach against me harder than I realized. Enough so that when I yanked in with my arms and butted up with my head, I caught him fair on the chin and he had no slack to take up the shock.

When I heard the crack I knew I'd done it. It sounded as though somebody had stepped on a rotten stick—a sort of crunching noise. He sagged back against my arms, the gun dropped out of his hand onto the tiled floor, and then I let him down.

He had a broken neck, that I knew. But there was a chance, if the spinal cord hadn't been broken, that he could be put in a cast and would get over it. If the cord was just pressed he might still live. If it had been broken, he was dead.

The cord was broken. He was as dead as a man could be!

MY SHOULDER, where the gun had landed, was already getting over the numb feeling it had and was begin-

ning to ache. And so was my head, for I'd managed to kill a man who certainly knew something about the jam poor Steve Kovacs was in.

I hadn't done it on purpose. He'd smacked at me with the gun and I'd done just what I'd been taught to do by a wrestling coach, in case a thing like that should ever happen.

As far as the man himself was concerned, I didn't care at all. He'd threatened me with a gun and he'd tried to smash my head in with it with no provocation whatsoever. But a dead man can't talk, and I'd wanted to ask some questions and hear some answers.

I pulled down the handkerchief from his face and saw he was some bird I'd remembered seeing around the card tables once in a while. But that didn't mean a thing. There are always bystanders, if the game's of any size.

The gun was right by him and I didn't pick it up. I could see where it was worn, where the blue had been polished off the barrel and cylinder—which meant it had been carried for some time in a shoulder rig. For several years, at least.

I stood up, and then Sol Dickie said from behind me:

"Hey! What's this?"

Sol was in the doorway, gaping at the man on the floor.

"What's the matter with him?" he said. "Didja upset him?"

"I certainly did," I said. "He held me up and started to crown me. We scuffled around a bit and I guess I broke his neck. It was self-defense, Sol. I had to do it, or else get smacked on the head with the gun. The gun's there on the floor."

He edged ahead until he was between the gun and me, and he stooped for it,

fast. I shoved him clear on over it.

"Leave it alone," I said. "It's got his prints on it and none of mine. It'll prove my story."

He didn't like being shoved around much, but he didn't argue. He picked up the gun, using a handkerchief I gave him, and we went in my room and I helped him wrap it so any prints on it wouldn't be damaged.

"The D. A.'ll be over," I said, "both about this and about Steve Kovacs, and this gun wants to be the same it is now. You've put in a call for him, haven't you?"

He said he had. That the whole law enforcement group had already left the county seat and were on their way.

"Say, who are you anyway?" he asked then.

"Joe Walters," I said. "Joseph H. Walters."

"What are you doing here? You're no gambler."

"How d'ya know that?"

"You always lose. Look, Walters!" he added. "I know there's something funny going on and I know you're in it. You stick around and you spend money and all you do is lose more in the games. You gave me a hand tonight. That Steve Kovacs, when he's been hitting it up he is like a crazy man if he gets mad. Here's two murders in one night and—"

"Now wait a minute," I said. "Maybe the fellow in Kovacs' car was murdered—I don't know. This man wasn't. I've got a right to protect myself. It's not murder when you're protecting yourself, is it?"

The kid shook his head. "I don't know anything about it," he said. "I hate to ask you on account of you helping out, but come on. We'll lock your room and the bathrom. It's not so bad in jail, we keep it clean. If I don't keep you there until the D. A. gets here, I'll lose my job, sure as anything."

"Wait until I get dressed," I said. "You know the guy in the bathroom?"

"Yeah," he said. "His name was Schuyler."

NEXT ISSUE

IN AT THE KILL

A Murder Frame Novelet

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER III

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE



DURING the rest of the night, there was a lot of time for me to think. The jail was clean enough, but it had a smell of disinfectants and of staleness, and I'm used to a mattress instead of iron slats under two thin blankets.

I knew that once I told the D. A. who I was and what I was in Ellerville for, I would be in the clear, and so I wasn't worried about myself. As far as the Schuyler case was considered, that was in the bag.

The one I'd tangled with was too young and too big to be the Schuyler I was looking for, but it was a cinch to be some relative of his. All I'd have to do would be to look around and locate this bird's running mates and my man would be among them.

But I was bothered about Steve Kovacs. He was tied up in the business, some way, because the Schuyler I had killed had been after me for butting in on the Kovacs angle.

And, worst of all, it was entirely possible that Steve had killed his friend during an argument and had been too tight to remember it afterward. While I didn't think he had, there have been a lot of cases where just that same thing has happened. And while Steve wasn't a pal or anything like that, I liked the lad and didn't want to see him railroaded if he didn't have the ride coming.

Sol stopped by and saw I wasn't sleeping, so he went over to the one all-night restaurant and brought back coffee for both of us.

"You see how it is," he said. "If I didn't take you in, I'd lose my job. It was a rotten trick, after you helping me with Steve Kovacs."

I asked him how long Kovacs had been in the country. He said Steve had drifted in about a year before, had worked for wages until he got an idea

of what it was all about, and then had branched out for himself. Also that he had brought money in with him when he came.

"Who were the two men that saw Kovacs talking with the man he's supposed to have killed?" I asked.

Sol looked startled. "Golly!" he said. "One of them was this Schuyler—the one that held you up!"

"The one I killed, you mean."

He got red in the face. "Yeah! The other one was a pal of his, named McGrath."

I asked what McGrath looked like and got a description that might possibly fit the Schuyler I was looking for. I asked if the man Kovacs was supposed to have killed had been robbed.

"I don't know," Sol Dickie said. "I had the car towed to the fire station, and I ran the fire truck out and backed the car in the stall. That place is locked, so the coroner can't say I let anybody disturb the evidence. Same as the guy down in your bathroom. That door's locked and I got the key."

"Do me a favor, Sol," I said. "Go in and turn Kovacs over on his side. He's driving me crazy!"

I was in the next cell to him and he was sleeping on his back and sounding as though he were sawing through a heavy log.

"Tell me something else," I said, when Sol came back and Kovacs was quieter. "You asked me what I was doing here in town. What's the idea of that? You don't usually go around asking people who come here what their business is, do you, Sol?"

He got red again. "Well, no, Joe—I mean Mr. Walters—but I heard several fellas talking about you and nobody knows anything about you. I guess I was just sort of curious. I guess some of them think you're looking for a place to buy, and some others think you're some kind of a cop, and some others think you're hiding out. What they said got me thinking. I guess I just got curious, is all."

THAT'S a small town for you. All I was doing was minding my business.

"Y'see, you wear decent clothes most of the time," Sol went on, "and you got a good car and you talk like you been educated. So they wonder what you're doing here, like I say."

"Sol," I said, and made it sound mysterious, "I'm looking for the Lost Dutchman Mine. I have reason to believe there's gold in these hills."

"But there ain't no mines around here," said Sol, looking bewildered.

"There's no law against a man digging one, is there?" I asked. "I think I've run into a gold mine!"

He left me then, shaking his head as though he thought I was crazy. He was wrong, for if I dug up George Schuyler after he had been missing seven years, I was a cinch for a bonus—and gold is where you find it. George Schuyler was my particular gold mine and I'd found him in Ellerville.

The D. A. and the sheriff and two deputies and the coroner all got there between eight and ten the next morning. They came in two cars, with a hearse to boot, and as the D. A. was in the ten-o'clock car it was a quarter after that before I got out.

I told him who I was, what I was there for, how I had miscalculated and killed the brother of the man I was looking for, and how and why I was pretty sure I knew who my man was.

The D. A. scowled. "We'll have to have an inquest, you know," he said. "It's too bad you didn't have a witness to this attempted assault on you, Mr. Walters."

"If I'd had a witness the assault wouldn't have been attempted," I told him. "But you've got something here that's phony. These two Schuylers are tied up with Kovacs in some way."

"How? And why?"

"That's what I'd like to know. I can't very well find out while I'm sitting in jail. And my man is liable to get away and I'll have to start hunting him all over again."

Sol Dickie hadn't even bothered to search me for a gun the night before. I still had one, as well as all my identification. The D. A. checked this over again and compared my gun license with the number on it.

"I guess I can release you on your own recognizance until the inquest," he said grudgingly. "But don't leave town or anything like that. I'll tell you when the inquest will be."

"Thanks," I said. "Maybe I can help out."

"I don't see how," he said severely. "We apparently have an open-and-shut case against this man Kovacs. Kovacs is the only one in town who knew the man who was murdered. He's the only one that could have had a possible motive for the crime. He was seen talking with the man at the scene of the crime at approximately the time it was committed. The fact of his being drunk doesn't alter the matter one way or the other," he continued. "He claims he remembers nothing of the evening at all. Doesn't even know how he arrived in jail. It's an open-and-shut case, Mr. Walters."

"Well, maybe," I said. "I've been wrong before. Do you mind if I go and hunt up this man McGrath and see if he's the one that I came out here looking for?"

"I've already sent an officer after the man," the D. A. explained. "He's the one remaining witness to the talk between Kovacs and the murdered man at nine last evening. You, unfortunately, disposed of the other."

"I'd say 'fortunately' disposed of the other," I commented. "If I hadn't disposed of him he would most certainly have disposed of me. Do I understand that you'll release this McGrath to us after he's testified about the Kovacs case? I've got a warrant for him."

"Well, he might fight extradition," the D. A. said cautiously. "As long as he tells his story about seeing Kovacs and this man he killed together, he's nothing to me."

I LEFT then, just in time to join the sheriff and Sol Dickie. They were going to make the rounds and look at all the corpses again. Sol had already gone around once with the D. A. and the coroner, but the sheriff was up for reelection in the fall and had stopped to do a little campaigning.

Business before duty was his motto, I guess—and besides that, saloons are swell places to campaign in and I guess the sheriff figured he needed a few drinks before looking at a bunch of dead men.

After seeing the man in Kovacs' car I didn't blame the sheriff a bit. I'd expected something pretty bad, but this was worse than that. The poor guy's head was all over the front of the car and there was blood splashed up on the roof of it. The man was so badly battered around the face you had to guess what he must once have looked like.

The coroner was there, fidgeting around.

"A brutal crime, Sheriff!" he said to the lawman. "Brutal! The man who did this must be a maniac!"

The sheriff had heard the story about Kovacs' nasty temper.

"Or someone that lost his head when he was full of liquor," he said.

I'd been thinking hard about the night before, so I took the sheriff to one side.

"Now, look!" I said. "Last night, just about half past nine or a quarter to ten, Kovacs tried to sit in Fales' poker game. Fales wouldn't let him light because he was just about at the falling-down stage. But he was good-natured. Now if he'd been mad enough to beat a man to death a half hour before that, he wouldn't have taken it that way. He'd have still been on his toes.

"He was too far gone to pick up the jack the job was done with, I'll swear to it. There were six of us in the game besides Fales, and every one of us'll tell you the same thing."

The sheriff looked very wise. "I don't

know what a drunk will do, and you don't know," he said flatly. "He could have forgotten all about it in that length of time."

"Well, the man was killed before that time, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, sure. Between nine and half past."

Then I gave him the clincher.

"I saw Steve after that, then. And anybody around will tell you he came to town in the clothes he's got on now. Figure it out—you've seen him."

"I don't get it," said the sheriff.

I waved at the car.

"Take a look," I said. "The killer was inside the car. Do you think he could have done a job like that and not be covered with blood? Steve hasn't got a speck of blood on him anywhere. I took him to jail last night, and I know!"

"Hey, Doc!" the sheriff called heavily. "Come here and listen to this!"

About then the D. A. wandered in, and in fifteen minutes Steve Kovacs was up in front of a bar, taking his morning drink and wondering what had happened the night before. He was telling both Henry Gillis and me that the town had gone crazy.

CHAPTER IV

EVERYTHING IN LINE



McGRATH—or George Schuyler, as I was beginning to call him to myself—was not to be found. Nowhere. He'd been the boss office man at the biggest mill and was fairly well known, but he'd apparently just dropped out of sight.

I thought he might have been afraid the Kovacs affair would bring a lot of law to town and that he would be recognized. But this didn't hold much water when I stopped to think how long he'd been in town and that he was wanted for something that had happened seven years before and about fif-

teen hundred miles away.

The D. A. seemed to think I'd given him a break by not letting him take Steve Kovacs to the county seat and charge him with the murder, so he was playing ball with me like a major-leaguer. He was letting his men do the looking, and their stall was that they wanted McGrath for a witness about whom he'd seen talking with the murdered man in the car and also about the Schuyler I'd killed in the bathroom.

Sol Dickie was also supposed to be looking for McGrath, though he didn't know what he was wanted for any more than the sheriff's deputies knew.

"I should have asked George Schuyler last night just where McGrath was," he said. "I mean when Schuyler told me about seeing Kovacs talking to the man in the car. But how'd I know you was going to break his neck?"

"It was Schuyler, then, who told you that he and McGrath saw the guy and Kovacs talking," I said. "That it?"

He said that it was.

About this time the coroner and the D. A. came down the street.

"How'd it be, Walters," the D. A. asked, "if we held the inquest on this man you killed day after tomorrow at the county seat? Can you make it? I'll leave two of my boys on the job here. They've got nothing to do until then, anyway."

"Broken neck," the coroner said to me. "Clean break. You must be a powerful man, Walters."

"It's a trick, is all," I admitted. "If he'd known anything about rough-and-tumble brawling he'd just have a sore back. He could have let himself go and it wouldn't have hurt him seriously."

We walked down to the hotel, the four of us.

"I don't think that there'll be any trouble about this," the D. A. said to me. "I'd like to know something about the man, is all. All I know is that he came to town and moved in with McGrath. McGrath has a house, you know. He's a bachelor."

I knew it, and said so. Since I'd decided McGrath was my man, I'd found out a lot of things about him.

"That's what makes me think your theory as to their being brothers is correct," the D. A. went on. "McGrath wasn't a friendly man by any means, and yet he takes this stranger in. That would tend to prove you correct—that this McGrath is undoubtedly George Schuyler, the man you're looking for."

"And the man you're looking for, too," I said. "It seems darned funny to me that a man as well known as he is could just drop out of sight."

"We'll find him," the D. A. promised. "He didn't leave in a car. Of that, we're fairly certain. They had a traffic check on both sides of town last night—state policemen checking licenses. He didn't go out by car, I feel I'm safe in saying."

By that time we were at the hotel, and we went to the bathroom to look at the corpse I'd made.

STRANGELY, the man looked smaller than he had the night before, but maybe that was only natural. Death always seems to shrink a person. He had a thin, hatchety face, which had become a discolored, dirty gray. There wasn't a mark on him except a half-healed scratch on his wrist, and there was a little blood on the sleeve of that shirt, which was surprisingly clean compared to the rest of his costume.

There was little tan on his face, and his hands were clean and well kept, with the forefinger on the left amputated at the first joint. It all meant plenty.

"Well, maybe I can give you a hand," I said to the D. A. "You check your records for a bird that's been vagged a good many times. This guy's a professional gambler and he's probably been playing the small camps around on paydays."

"He's not a logger, in spite of his clothes," I went on, "because his hands are too nice, and that forefinger being off makes him, in all probability, a fast man with the cards. He can get that

stump under the deck and take off bottoms without the end of his finger flashing out into sight. He lit in here, and his brother had to take care of him and introduce him around. He hasn't played around town or I'd have sat in a game or so with him, so that means he's been playing the mining camps. The clothes make that almost a cinch bet. Does all this make sense?"

They all agreed, and the D. A. promised he'd look up the man's record.

"Well, you'd better get your boys on the hunt for McGrath and let 'em try and see what happened to him," I said then. "My guess is that when you find him you'll find something that isn't pretty."

Both the D. A. and the sheriff started to stutter together, asking what I was driving at. And then, before I had a chance to tell them, Sol Dickie came dashing in.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Come on! It's another dead one, by golly! Down by the tracks. Some kids found it!"

A train had run over this one, and my guess about him not being pretty was absolutely correct. From his shoulders up, you'd never have known it had once been a man. The train had just spread the mess for twenty feet down the track. Even the ties were smeared.

The clothes were ordinary business clothes and the D. A. went through the pockets.

"Well, here's your man, all right," he said to me as he straightened. "At least it's McGrath. Here's bills and a couple of letters and his wallet with a driver's license."

I'd been seeing too many dead people and it was getting me down.

"I'm going back to town and get a drink," I said. "When are you going to move the bodies back to town?"

"I doubt if we will until tomorrow," the D. A. said, shaking his head. "What do you think, Doc?"

The coroner looked up from the body, or what was left of it.

"I'm going to have the inquest here,"

he growled. "I can set it at the scene of death if I so desire. There's too damn many killings going on around here!"

"This is an accident," the D. A. said.

The coroner shrugged. "If you can tell me why the man was walking out here along the railroad tracks, I'll maybe believe you," he said. "There's a road that runs the same way fifty feet from here, and it's a lot easier walking. He'd have had to climb up the bank to get here. We did, didn't we? Don't tell me he was trying to catch a ride on the train, because he'd have done that in the yards when the train was stopped, or just this side when it was pulling out slow."

"And"—he waved his hand—"if you'll look you can see how the embankment is all scuffed up. The kids might have done some of it and we might have done a little more, but we didn't make those deep gouges. They were made by two men carrying a third. This would be the third. They laid his head on the track and the train took care of the rest."

"But why should they do that? We know it's McGrath."

The coroner said he'd be darned if he knew, but that he intended to find out. That it was part of his duty to find out, and, by golly, nobody ever accused him of not doing his duty.

"It'll all come out in the wash, gentlemen," I soothed, "and I think we'll do the washing tonight. I've got ideas about this."

"Somebody's going to hang for this!" the D. A. promised.

"Five'll get you ten they don't," I said. "I'm in here pitching for my bonus and I can't get it by any guesswork. You'll never hang the lad that did this."

LEAVING them, then, I went back to the saloon.

"That was a shame about that Schuyler, Joe," Henry Gillis said. "Who'd have thought he was a bad one?"

"You knew him very well, Henry?"

I asked.

"He came in the bar now and then. Once in awhile he'd get plastered, maybe. That's all. Always had money and he always spent it. I like people like that, Joe."

I didn't know whether the last was a hint or not, but I bought both of us another drink.

"What about McGrath?" I asked. "Was he good bar business, too?"

"He never came in the place," Henry said. "But then, I guess maybe he didn't have any money."

"I wouldn't know," I murmured, thinking about the forty-eight thousand George Schuyler—McGrath to Henry—had taken off with. "He must've had a salary, at least."

Henry shook his head and said that most salaried people weren't good bar customers.

I left and went looking for Steve Kovacs, figuring to get to him before he got too full to talk. There was one point I had to straighten before everything fell into line. Steve was in the second saloon down the street but was still in fair shape, so I bought a round.

"Hey, Steve," I said. "I want to ask you something."

"You my friend," he said. "From the jail you take me. I tell you anything."

He had forgotten I was the one who had led him to jail, and I didn't remind him of it.

"It's about this friend of yours," I said. "I can't pronounce his name."

"It is Bela—" The last name was something that had to be half sneezed.

"That's right," I said. "Now tell me—he's supposed to be from the old country. Wasn't he here in this country before?"

"Bela, he travels like me," Steve said very proudly. "All around, all around. Four times Bela has been in this country. He has worked in this country. He can the language speak."

George Schuyler had come from a factory town called Roslyn. I took my chance and asked, "Did he by any

chance ever work in Roslyn?"

"Ho!" Steve chuckled. "In Roslyn Bela works in what you call cannery. The canned corn. The canned pea. The canned bean."

"How long ago?"

"Eight-nine year ago. It was Bela's second trip to this country. He save his money and he lose him to this Schuyler man you kill. That was a fine thing, my friend, that you kill this man. He was crook. He take Bela's money with the cards, the dice. All the money Bela has in the bank he takes."

"Thanks, Steve," I said. "You've done me a favor."

"Joe, you do me the favor," Steve insisted. "You kill the man that rob my friend, which is very fine."

Everything was in line, then.

CHAPTER V

"GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT"



NATURALLY, there was nothing doing until dark, because I had no way of telling if McGrath's house was being watched or not. The sheriff had gone through it, after a fashion, after finding the body by the tracks, but he hadn't been in there long. I had made a point of seeing he wasn't.

The D. A. and the sheriff and I now went in the back door without turning on a light, and I parked the D. A. in the front room and the sheriff in a small cubicle off the kitchen. I'd even borrowed a gun for the D. A.

It was only about nine-thirty, but we weren't taking any chances on missing our man through carelessness. I took a sort of roving assignment, but I'd found a pair of McGrath's carpet slippers and I wasn't making any noise while I prowled around.

About eleven I had to stop the D. A. from smoking a cigarette. It hadn't occurred to him that somebody coming in from outdoors would smell fresh smoke

and recognize it as such. About twelve I had to wake up the sheriff, because he'd fallen asleep in his chair and was snoring along in great shape.

But at one-thirty the screen door at the back creaked and we got ready to go into action.

I was just inside the dining room, with my back against the wall, so that whoever came in would pass me. I had a finger on the light switch. It was arranged that we were to let whoever it was get all the way in, so we'd be all around him and there would be no chance for trouble. But the sheriff must have gone to sleep again and was waked by the noise.

"That you, Walters?" he called out softly.

The screen door slammed when whoever was holding it let it go, and I went through the kitchen and past the sheriff and to the door. I could see a dim figure pounding toward the road.

"Hold it!" I shouted.

The man kept running, and I lined the gun at him about knee level and started in.

It's hard shooting like that. It was shooting by feel, and that means you have to know your gun. I didn't want to kill the man because he had done nothing to warrant that. All he was after was money. So I kept my shots low and got him through the ham on the fourth try.

He went down and never said a word. And that scared me. The sheriff and the D. A. came boiling out from behind me, but I yanked them back.

"Now wait!" I told them. "We do this right. Split up and each of you take him from one side. When I shout, you put the flash on him and be ready. I'll do the shooting."

"The devil you will!" said the sheriff.

"Why should you?"

"I don't want him killed. Do as I say."

"Do as he says, Pat," the D. A. ordered. "It's his show."

So they spread out and turned their

flashlights on when I sang out.

Henry Gillis, the bartender, was on the ground, with a gun held up and ready. His bad leg was doubled under him and he sat on it like a hen on a nest of eggs. He was grinning, but he didn't look as though it was at anything funny. He kept jerking his head toward each one of the beams of light coming at him.

"All right, come and get me!" he snarled.

The sheriff was at his right side.

"Drop that gun, Henry!" he cried.

Henry turned and swung the weapon up, and I took a chance and shot at it. The slug hit both the gun and Henry's hand, and it sent the gun spinning through the air for twenty feet.

And then we collected Henry and took him to the doctor's house.

THEY held their inquest the next day, and I headed back for the home office the following morning. I had a letter from the D. A. to my manager, telling him what a help I'd been to law and order.

The stolen money that we'd found in the McGrath house had been put in the bank and would be released to us as soon as the formalities were over, which meant a bonus for sure for me.

This part of the business was a real break for everyone concerned. Usually an embezzler spends the dough as fast as he can get rid of it, but George Schuyler had happened to be a miser.

Henry Gillis was back of the whole thing, though Kovacs' friend just coming to town speeded it all up. But they didn't even make a charge against Henry. There was nothing they could hold him on that would stick.

George Schuyler's younger brother, who was a professional crook and gambler, had wandered into Ellenville, probably just passing through and dropping in to say hello, and possibly wanting a little dough. Of course he knew about his brother taking the bank for forty-eight grand.

He got tight and talked in front of Henry, and Henry promoted the idea of finding where the money was hidden and hijacking it. McGrath couldn't complain, because as George Schuyler he'd stolen it in the first place. The gambling brother had just found where the money was when Steve Kovacs' friend came to town.

Kovacs' friend knew both the gambling brother and the absconding one. He had banked with one, and lost money to the other. They knew he'd be a cinch to talk. So they knocked him on the head, figuring that Kovacs would be blamed for the killing, and even went out of their way to plant that idea with Sol Dickie. They were trying to make it certain.

Then the gambling brother got panicky and really went bad. He asked for getaway money and the miser brother wouldn't come through. They probably had a knock-down, drag-out fight about it, though it's possible it was just plain cold-blooded murder.

Anyway, the gambling one killed the absconding one and took the body down to the tracks, thinking the law would figure the man had accidentally been killed while trying for a getaway. Somebody was going to be blamed and he didn't want it to be him.

It was after this that he told Dickie about seeing Kovacs and the friend arguing in the car. He stuck around just for that. That would throw the first killing on Kovacs—and with his brother's death being passed off as an accident, he was in the clear. But then, when he saw me butting in and helping Sol take Kovacs to jail, he got worried and thought maybe I'd seen something fishy.

That's where he slipped. If he had let well enough alone he'd have probably made out all right. But he followed me and braced me, and he got a broken neck for it. I got wise to him being the killer when I saw the blood on his sleeve. The shirt had been put on after his arm had been scratched, so the blood must

have got there from somewhere else.

It all checked up. After killing his brother he'd gone home and changed his clothes, all except the shirt. He either hadn't noticed the blood on the sleeve or figured no one else would. We found the clothes in a trash barrel out behind the house.

HENRY GILLIS had made the plans, and the gambling brother had told him where the money was located. The dead brother had even added to it. Just a miser. The gambling brother wasn't taking any chances in telling Henry this, because the money was under the floor and we had to tear up half the house to get it finally.

Henry had made the plans but no one had acted on them, and the D. A. couldn't do a thing about it. In fact, Henry threatened to sue the county and state for being shot, and the only reason he didn't was because we all three swore we would testify he had broken into the house.

He hadn't—he was just getting ready to. And the funny part of it was that he didn't hold a grudge against me and he knew I was the one who shot him, that I was the one who had figured he was back of it, and that I'd laid for him and trapped him so I could be sure and find the money. He explained to me how he felt.

"It's your job," he said. "You get paid for it year in and year out and I can't blame you for working at it. I don't hold a grudge."

There was something that puzzled me. Gillis had been thirty years tending bar in that one county and had never even seemed to want money. He lived quietly, and money seemed the last thing on his mind.

"What in the devil did you want with that much dough, anyway, Henry?" I asked.

He looked wistful. He was propped up in the hospital bed.

"I got thinking about what Steve Kovacs was all the time talking about,"

he mumbled. "About seeing different people, different places. It takes money to travel around like that, and I didn't have any. It wasn't like I was robbing anybody—the guy had stolen the money himself. And then, I didn't figure any killings in it."

I started to laugh, and Henry asked me what was so funny.

"Just this," I said. "Here Kovacs gets you all hot and bothered about traveling. I was just talking to him, down the street, and he told me he's going to stay here the rest of his life, that he's never going away. He says he's going

to settle down and grow up with the country. He's giving me your argument and you're giving me his. As near as I can make out, I'm the only one in the whole affair who wins. And I win for sure!"

Henry asked how I meant that.

"Well," I said, "I told Sol Dickie there was gold in these hills, and I was right. And part of it will be coming back to me on the bonus I'll get."

"You ought to travel on it, Joe," Henry said thoughtfully. "Get around, see things and people."

I told him I had.



The "Inside" of Detective Work

12. Bullets

IT IS impossible to tell by chemical analysis the make or origin of a bullet. Bullets are all of uniform composition.

Small arms have grooved bores in order to give a bullet "twist" as it leaves the barrel and prevent it from turning end-over-end in the air. No two guns have identical grooves and so it is possible to prove if a certain bullet has come from a particular gun.

Sometimes a bullet that has pierced cloth will bear identifying marks left by the fabric.

If a bullet found in a murder victim has been split into bits, by collecting the parts and weighing them it is possible to determine the caliber of the gun from which it was fired.

A comparison microscope is used in bullet identification. This instrument makes it possible to fuse the images of two bullets and determine if they coincide exactly as to all markings.

Bullets used for comparison with a questioned bullet are generally obtained by shooting them into water.

The path traveled by a bullet is a parabola, but for killers it frequently is a straight line leading direct to the chair!

—*Carier Critz.*

THE

KING OF THE CORPSE MAKERS

CHAPTER I

THE ODDITY OF SPEARS

BENNY STILLMAN was an ugly little man. He had a small mouth, a pair of yellow eyes and a pointed nose. The nose was sensitive and twitched when he was afraid. It twitched now.

Benny skittered along Dutton Street. He only had four blocks to go to reach the river. He kept to the deepest shadows next to the buildings, shoulders hunched, collar up around his chin. When he came to the arc-light he ducked his head and ran.

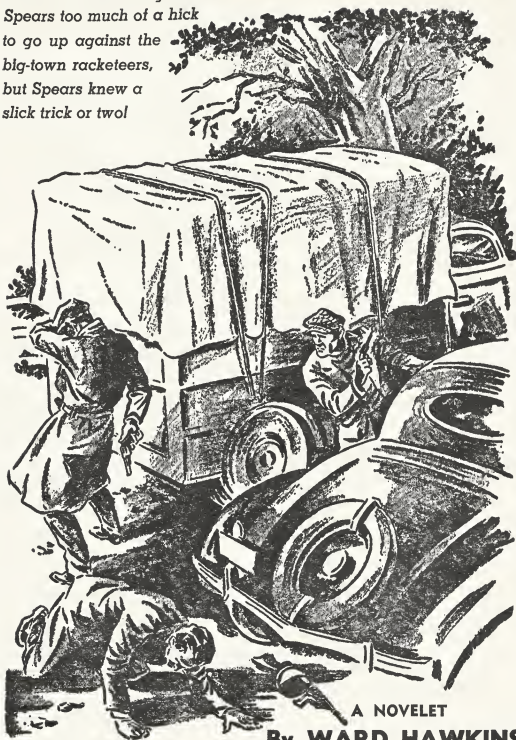
Safe again in the shadows beyond he stopped and looked back. He held his breath and stared hard. No one was following him—at least no one he could see.

The crooked dirty length of Dut-

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Spears shot the man
with Gus through
the temple

*The authorities thought Jim
Spears too much of a hick
to go up against the
big-town racketeers,
but Spears knew a
slick trick or two!*



A NOVELET

By **WARD HAWKINS**

ton Street vanished into windy darkness. Nothing moved on it. The ramshackle warehouses and dirty shops were pack-jammed into two long silent rows—deserted. Few people came this way, the street leading to only an old dock and the oily blackness of the river. Those few who did come were grubby unpleasant people like Benny or else they were like the man who was undoubtedly following Benny.

There was someone back there all right. Benny knew that even though he couldn't see him. Benny's jaw worked and his eyes hurt from staring. He drew a ragged breath, cursed and then went on again.

Another block—two—and then an arc-light. He went under it like a frightened rabbit. In the shadows he whipped about, the skin between his shoulder-blades squirming. Still he saw nothing. A bit of paper kited under an arc-light and flicked out of sight into the darkness. But there was no man.

Benny went on again. His pace quickened. Presently he worked up to a run. Once he had given in to the impulse to run blindly he couldn't control it. His flight became headlong.

He pounded along, head back, eyes wide, breath sawing through his slack mouth. He crossed the next intersection, tripped over the far curb, hands outstretched, and nearly fell. He moaned and staggered on. His heels drummed hollowly across the planks of the dock.

There was a ladder at the dock edge. Benny dived at it and scrambled down to the small landing at water level. He looked frantically into the darkness.

"Gus!" he yelled. "Oh, Gus!"

The long, sleek hull of a cabin cruiser swam in the gloom a short way out. The forepeak and the cabin were outlined dimly against a cluster of lights across the river. The motor bubbled, idling. Benny danced on one foot and then the other.

"Sure, Benny. Right here," a voice said.

"Hurry! For Pete's sake!"

"Plenty of time, Benny—plenty of time."

The beam of a powerful light flicked out from the boat. It fingered around and found Benny. Benny threw one arm over his eyes.

"Hey! Look out with that light!" he squealed.

WHATEVER else he had to say was lost in the sudden clatter of the machinegun. It was only a short burst—a handful of lead. It slapped Benny in the face and chest and knocked him back. Benny's legs went limp. He flopped down on his back as though he couldn't get there quick enough. He drummed his heels on the board landing.

The beam of light seemed to hold him there—a bug on a pin, wriggling. "So long, Benny."

The light went out. The motor cleared its throat, roared wide open and the boat slid away. Backwash sprayed up on the landing. It splashed in Benny's upturned face. But Benny didn't care—there wasn't any more Benny Stillman to care.

That was the way it was when Jim Spears got there.

He was the one who had followed Benny. The machinegun had done its work while he still was a block away. By the time he got to the ladder the boat was a soft murmur down the river and the water sucked around the piling, chuckling.

Jim Spears had a short stocky build and an odd face. He had a full white mustache, deep blue eyes that sparkled, a skin tanned leatherish by the sun. He looked fifty but it was hard to tell. He went down the ladder like any youngster.

On the landing he got out a flashlight and squatted beside the body. Benny was a mess. Three or four bullets had ripped his stomach. The rest had splattered like buckshot upward across his face.

Spears emptied Benny's pants pockets first. Then he went gingerly into the blood-soaked coat and vest. It was a

dirty job. His hands got bloody at it. The things he found he put on a spread handkerchief — billfold, letters, keys, odds and ends.

Finished, he knotted the handkerchief and washed his hands in the river. Then he climbed the ladder to the dock again. He left Benny there for the gulls to wonder about and—well, it didn't matter what the gulls might do before the police found the body.

The apartment was on the East Side. It was a good apartment, not expensive and not cheap. Solid worth, like the girl who lived there—Martha Hurst.

She was tall and well-formed. She had a lovely mass of brown hair, long brown hair. She had brown eyes and she just missed being beautiful but no one minded. She had loyalty and sincerity and these are better.

Just now she was afraid. Anxiety made her eyes wide.

There was a small table between her and Jim Spears. On it were the handkerchief and the possessions of Benny Stillman, all a little bloody. Spears had been writing on a pad. He rubbed his mustache with the pencil.

"Damn' little help this is going to be."

He had a soft mild voice and here in the better light the oddity of Jim Spears was more apparent. He was a Westerner, his eyes were used to seeing miles instead of blocks. White hair, white mustache and a deeply tanned skin, square steady hands, a poker face every moment and blue eyes—this was Jim Spears.

Martha Hurst looked at him and she saw a nice old man with a white mustache and she wanted to cry. She had brought him here from a ranch two thousand miles away—to be killed. She was almost certain of that now. It was a mistake.

Jim Spears' son had told her that Jim Spears was a legend in the West, that as sheriff he had cleaned up the toughest towns in Montana. They were fairy tales, a son's bragging. Look at Jim Spears—a nice sweet old man who was

shy in her company.

"Please, hadn't you better give it up?" she said.

Looking at her, Jim Spears could see how much it cost her to ask that question. And he knew exactly why she had. But knowing didn't help much. He couldn't, he thought, get up and roar around and shoot the lights out to show her what a holy terror he was. He smiled and there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"These curly wolves," he said, "can't be so tough if Benny Stillman was a sample."

"But—" the girl twisted her handkerchief and looked like she wanted to cry in it—"It's not Benny's kind. Benny was killed and it's the ones who killed him. They shot him, didn't they, without warning? What could anyone do? Oh, damn! You're smiling!"

She cried in the handkerchief.

"Here, now!" Spears got panicky. "Fiddlesticks! It ain't as bad—I mean, well quit it, girl!"

Finally he sat back helplessly and let her have it out. When at last she lifted her head she'd found a shaky little smile somewhere and put it on. "I'm such a silly."

"But you shouldn't worry about me, honest. I know I ain't packed a star in years but—hell's fire, I'm as good as I ever was."

Martha blew her nose. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you," Jim Spears said.

He sat forward and out of habit his unrevealing poker face was back, his eyes were just an amazing blue without expression.

"This Benny Stillman was Johnny's cellmate and they were both paroled at the same time about three weeks ago. I thought maybe Benny would know why Johnny jumped his parole and where Johnny disappeared to.

"So I followed Benny around all day up 'till ten o'clock tonight, when he got killed. I didn't learn much. This stuff here don't help either. There's just these

two business cards. One for Red Ball Trucking Company and one for West Coast Transfer. Both are freight companies and they should be open all night."


He got up and found his hat. "I guess I'll go around and see about them now."

Martha Hurst came to grasp his coat lapels. "Please be careful—for my sake."

"Fiddle!" said Jim Spears. "Don't worry so." He gathered the handkerchief and Benny's things. "You go to bed," he told her firmly. "I'll call you first thing in the morning."

CHAPTER II

KEEP OUT!



THE sign, RED BALL TRUCKING CO. was new but the glass panel was very dirty and so was the office. Spears decided it was an old company with a new name. He liked that. It was probably a crooked outfit—honest people don't often change their names.

But the office door was locked and there was no one in the office. The light was too bright to be a night light—someone had to be around.

Around the corner he found a big sliding door with a little door cut into it. The little door had a STAY OUT sign on it but Spears went in anyway.

He found himself in a huge garage. The office in the corner off to the left had glass walls inside and enough light came through to see by. Two big trucks were nosed up to a work bench. The hood of the nearest was raised and two men were standing there. They were looking at Jim Spears.

One was a big Teutonic looking man. He had short stiff hair, pale blue eyes. He had extra flesh hanging everywhere, bags under his eyes, jowls folding down over a stiff collar and a paunch that seemed to bounce and sway when he walked.

The other man was just as tall but in

the fashion of an animated beanpole. He was a mechanic by his greasy coveralls. He had dark round eyes in a thin pointed face. They both came over to Spears.

The paunchy man poked his belly at Spears. "What the hell, Dad? Can't yah read?" he asked.

He meant the STAY OUT sign.

"There was nobody in the office," said Spears.

"Damn, I'll lock that door!" the paunchy man said.

He scratched inside his coat and looked at Spears with anger. The string-bean mechanic did the same thing, wiping his hands on a bunch of waste. He stood back of the paunchy man. He let the paunchy man do the talking.

"Well, whadda yah want?"

"I got some freight to haul. Machinery."

"Sorry. I'm all booked up."

"You mean you don't want business?"

"I got business. Too damned much. You'll have to take yours to some other outfit."

"You're lucky."

"Yeah, I suppose I am." The paunchy man half turned away. "Well, that's the size of it, Dad. Sorry."

Spears didn't take the dismissal. He stood there a moment. "Did you ever have a fellow name of Johnny Spears work here?"

The paunchy man swung his stomach around again. His pale blue eyes might have widened but if they did he covered it quickly.

"Never heard of him."

"Benny Stillman then?"

This time the effect was definite. The paunchy man looked surprised. The mechanic stopped looking at Spears long enough to exchange a questioning glance with his friend. They both looked back at Spears.

"Never heard of him either."

"That's funny," said Spears.

"What's funny about it?"

"He was in here this afternoon."

"Oh, he was, huh?"

The two exchanged looks again. The paunchy man moved closer to Spears. The mechanic took a couple of steps to the side. He was fingering a wrench he'd found in one of his many pockets, sort of testing its balance and getting the feel of it—but casually.

"Lots of people come in here," the paunchy man said. "Whadda yah think of that?"

Spears was at his mildest, a stocky better than middle-aged man with a soft voice and a white mustache. "I said it was funny. No offense."

He let his gaze wander around, taking in the trucks in detail.

"Pretty nosy, ain't yah?"

"Well now," Spears apologized, "I didn't mean to be. I'd better get going."

He made a movement toward the door without taking his eyes from them.

"Say! Who are you, anyway?"

"You don't care. You ain't haulin' for me."

"Sure we do. Aw, yah don't need to get huffy. Stick around."

The paunchy man was being so very very friendly all of a sudden. He fairly exuded kindness. And he was also sidling up to within grabbing distance of Spears. The stringbean mechanic was off to the side, almost out of sight.

Spears guessed the stringbean could beat him to the door. And Spears didn't want to know what they would do to him when they made him stay. Spears' expression was faintly regretful. He stepped and kicked the paunchy man in the belly.

It wasn't a light kick. It was a good solid one. The paunchy man *whooshed* like a blown tire. He grabbed his stomach and sat down carefully with it clutched between his hands. His face scrooched up red. His eyes were tight shut but his mouth was open wide. He laid himself down as if he meant to stay there.

It took a second or two for the stringbean to get over the shock. Spears faced him and waited. The stringbean's mouth snapped shut. He charged.

Spears let him come. The stringbean covered the ten feet between them in two strides. He had the wrench well over his back. He flailed it at Spears with a loose-jointed whipping overhand motion. Spears drove at him.

He sunk his shoulder into the skinny midsection. The wrench went over Spears' back, thudded painfully into his hip. He had the stringbean around the waist. He heaved him up chest-high, shifted him till he was horizontal to the floor. Then he threw the stringbean down hard and fell on top of him.

The stringbean hit the concrete with a terrific thump. But it didn't knock him out. He still had the wrench and he clipped Spears on the side of the head with it. It hurt like blazes. And Spears put in a bad moment before he nailed that bony wrist.

ONCE he had it he was practically on his way home. He slammed his fist into the stringbean's face hard and often. The stringbean writhed and kicked his long legs. He rolled his head and he whimpered. But Spears kept hitting him and hitting him and finally he knocked him unconscious.

There was blood on the side of Spears' face when he got to his feet. The wrench had torn his scalp. He mopped at it and went to stand above the paunchy man.

Intense burning hate looked at Spears through the pain-glaze in the big man's pale eyes. He was still holding his stomach. His breath whistled in his throat.

Spears prodded the stomach with his toe. "It hurts, don't it?"

The paunchy man hissed at him. Spears went away.

Adolph Hinkle was a roly-poly little man of unquenchable good spirits. Adversity seemed to roll off him like water off a duck. He had a thin fuzz of hair and his cheeks were healthy and pink. He wore horn-rimmed glasses which gave him a faintly clownish look.

Jim Spears thought Hinkle was a nice enough fellow but hardly what he expected a parole officer to be like. Yet

Hinkle was a parole officer. Johnny Spears and Benny Stillman were only two convicts among many in his charge. They had been, that is Benny was dead. And Johnny Spears had jumped his parole and vanished. Hinkle bounced out of his chair to catch and pump Spears' hand.

"Good morning, *good* morning," he chirped. "Come right in, Mr. Spears. Oh, I say! What happened to your face? Shaving, eh? I do it myself now and then."

He hustled Spears to a chair in his crowded little office. Then, after closing the door to the waiting room, he tipped back in his own chair and gave Spears his closest attention.

"Now tell me," he said. "What progress?"

"None to speak of," Spears answered. "Been lookin' around but I haven't found much. And you?"

"Nothing—nothing, I regret to say." He lost his happy expression for one of momentary concern. "Did you see the paper? About Benny Stillman? Shot by person or persons unknown! Terrible, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Spears said.

"And that puts an end to our hope of finding out something from him."

"We'll have to try something else."

Hinkle brightened up. "That's the idea! We mustn't let ourselves grow discouraged!"

"Got anything in mind?"

Hinkle rubbed the fuzz atop his nearly bald head and looked at the ceiling.

"Nothing at the moment. Let's see. A review of the facts may turn up something new. Do you want to or shall I? Very well, I shall start at the beginning.

"Your son, John Spears, came here three years ago, a country boy, strange to city ways. He fell into bad company and within a year he was arrested for robbery and sentenced to the penitentiary.

"After serving a year of his sentence he was paroled to me. I felt that he had certainly learned his lesson. Indeed he

told me time and again that nothing could induce him to steal again. You can imagine the shock it was to me when two weeks ago he failed to make his usual report. How I hated to call the police!"

Hinkle was very unhappy. "I tell you it's almost beyond bearing. In the past six months fifteen paroled convicts have violated their paroles—fifteen."

He was near to tears.

"It ain't your fault, is it?" Spears said.

"I feel that it is! I feel that somewhere I have failed in my duty to guide their feet along the pathways of righteousness."

He took off his glasses and polished them vigorously, looking undressed without them. "Well, have I forgotten anything?"

"Only that Johnny didn't tell me he was paroled. You'd think good news like that would be worth a telegram. But I didn't know he was out 'till his girl wrote and told me he'd disappeared."

He paused, then decided to go on. "And it's funny he'd jump his parole when him and his girl were goin' to get married. She told me they'd picked out a place to live and all. You got him a job, didn't you?"

"Indeed!" said Hinkle. "And a very good one. He was so pleased with it, he and the girl, that they bought me a little present. I showed it to you, didn't I? Well, just a moment then."

He went into an adjoining room and returned with a board on which were mounted a great many agates. "I collect agates as a hobby," Hinkle said. "He saw my collection and bought me this water agate. A remarkable stone, really!"

He had the whacky enthusiasm of a true collector. Spears looked at the stone.

"Naturally," Hinkle went on, "I was highly pleased. And it seemed to me to be a sort of a token, a pledge of good faith. Then, when he didn't report, I—well, it was a blow."

"I expect so," Spears said. He was still looking at the stone. Presently, he got

to his feet and picked up his hat. "Well, the only thing to do is keep trying. I'll go out and nose around some more."

Hinkle pumped Spears' hand again. "Do be careful! And above all, keep me informed!"

"I'll do that," Spears told him.

On the way out Spears passed a boy sitting on a bench in the outer office. The boy had a loud plaid blazer, a thin furtive face and a tweed cap which he twisted in long, nervous fingers.

The boy opened his mouth, as if he were going to speak to Spears. Spears was going to break his stride and then the boy changed his mind. He dropped his eyes and looked scared and uncomfortable.

Spears went on to the door and out.

CHAPTER III

DEATH FROM BEHIND



WEST Coast Transfer Company was a legitimate concern. Anyone could see that. They had a big new building, modern offices and the place hummed with activity. It was a change from the Red

Ball outfit, as much a change as the manager was from the paunchy man or the stringbean.

The manager, O'Brien, was a sharp-featured gray-haired man, who was obviously harassed but who talked to Spears as if he had all the time in the world.

"I don't remember those names," he said. He lit a cigarette and his hands trembled as he held the match. "But I'll check through my applications." He did that and ended up by shaking his head. "Nope. No Stillman. No Johnny Spears."

"I was afraid of that," Spears said.

"What'd he look like? Sometimes guys don't give their right names."

"I've got a picture of Spears."

"It's a chance. Let's see it."

He took the picture and held it to the

light. Then he put on his spectacles for a better look. He took off his spectacles with a whipping motion and turned on Spears. "This guy a friend of yours?"

"My son," Spears answered, puzzled. "Son!"

O'Brien swore. He studied Spears. He couldn't make up his mind about some tremendously important problem. He chewed his pencil.

"What the hell?" Spears said.

"Come into my office."

Spears went around the counter and into a small cubbyhole. O'Brien gave him a chair and squeezed the door shut. It was all very strange, the way he acted. He reached for the telephone, then changed his mind.

"I'll tell you first," he said.

Jim Spears felt a sudden emptiness in his chest. "Tell me," he said, with difficulty.

O'Brien got it over quickly. "This kid used to work for us. His name was Williams then. He left about two weeks ago. He took a truckload of silver fox furs with him. He never came back."

Jim Spears bent his head. He looked at the floor a long time. He felt sick and beaten up. His voice had an odd catch to it. "You're sure it's him?"

"No doubt of it."

Spears winced and closed his eyes. He was a tired old man. O'Brien could see what a blow it was. He felt badly about it too.

"You don't know nothing about it?" he said, not unkindly.

"Nothing."

"Now I've got to call the cops."

"Go ahead," Spears said.

The police came, Detectives Esterhauser and Schultz. Esterhauser asked questions. Schultz kept notes. Spears answered them in a dry, patient voice. His face showed little change but he was having a hard time of it inside. O'Brien felt a sudden anger, born of sympathy, flare. He took it out on the cops.

"By gum," he said, "you better get the lead out of your pants! You better do something about these stickups or

there's goin' to be hell to pay! Seven the last month! Not counting the kid running off with the furs. Where's it gonna stop?"

Esterhauser's feelings were hurt. He was a big gruff man who had trouble with his stomach, which caused him to belch. He smelled of beer and garlic. And he was pained by this unjust complaint.

"I'm doin' all I can, ain't I? It's this parole system I'm buckin' that's got me stopped. What can a guy do when they turn 'em out as fast as I put 'em in. Like with this kid. Last week we got word he jumped his parole. This week it turns out he swiped furs!"

That bit of philosophy, bitter as it was, stuck in Spears' mind. He carried it away with him. The kid in the plaid blazer, the one he'd seen in Hinkle's office, was going down the street when Spears left the truck company's office. How he came to be there Spears didn't know. And at the moment he didn't care.

Next to discovering Johnny had stolen the furs, the hardest thing Spears had to do was tell Martha Hurst.

SHE sat in a chair, bent forward, hugging her elbows. Spears felt like he was hitting her with a whip. He hurried to get it over.

"Johnny was helper on this truck," he was saying. "He wasn't supposed to know what he was haulin'. Neither was the driver. The truck was sealed. They say Johnny found out some way. They say he slugged the driver, dumped him in a ditch and disappeared—truck, furs and all."

"Do you think he did?" Martha asked.

"No doubt of it." He got to his feet and went to stare out the window. "But it ain't decided in my mind why he did it," he said over his shoulder.

"Why would anyone steal?"

"Maybe he didn't steal—see what I mean? Maybe he took those furs for a different reason. He promised me he was goin' straight. I never knew Johnny to break his word. So until I hear him say

it Johnny never stole those furs. He took 'em for some honest reason."

Martha Hurst thought of a lot of things to say but she didn't say them. Somehow she couldn't hurt this man. She couldn't ridicule so deep a faith. And deep down she believed the same things.

"I hope so," she said.

Spears picked up his hat. Martha stopped him. "Where are you going?"

"Down to that Red Ball outfit."

"What good will that do?"

"I told you about the time I had with 'em. They knew Johnny and they knew Benny, whether they said so or not. It's more than an even bet they knew Johnny was workin' for West Coast under a different name.

"Bein' like they are, a pack of crooks, if any deviltry comes off and they're around, they're responsible. Now look—Hinkle says fifteen of his parolees have jumped their paroles in the last six months. O'Brien says he's had seven trucks hi-jacked the last month. And Lord knows how many other robberies there's been we don't know about. And then the Red Ball outfit's got more business than they want.

"That only adds up one way—the Red Ball outfit is forcing convicts to jump their paroles and is makin' 'em hi-jack these trucks!"

Martha's eyes were wide. "But—but the police."

"I got no proof, that's why," Spears said.

Martha saw the truth in that. Her shoulders dropped and there was hopelessness like a dark shadow in her eyes. Spears cupped her chin and pulled it up.

"Keep it like that," he said. "We'll make out."

The apartment building in which Martha lived was built in the shape of a U, enclosing a long, narrow patio. From the entrance at the back end of the U to the street sidewalk it was about a hundred feet. There was a lawn in here on either side of a narrow walk—and shrubs. At the street sidewalk there was an elaborate archway.

Spears came out of the entrance with his head down and his hands in his coat pockets. He walked fast and he appeared to be lost in thought. He went along the narrow walk toward the street a dozen steps and suddenly stopped.

He stopped and turned in the same motion and came back at a sprint. He veered to the left of the entrance and the potted shrub that stood there. He got the kid in the blazer and dragged him out.

The kid was as near fainting as he'd ever been. His thin pimpled face was pale, his mouth made a small round O. His eyes bugged out at Spears' right-hand coat pocket.

Spears held his hand in there. He poked the kid with it.

"Aaaaawck!" the kid jabbered. "D-don't shoot!"

"The heck I won't!"

Spears made his face ugly and his eyes slitted. He shoved his stiff forefinger into the kid's stomach. "Here it is!"

"Aaaaawck," the kid said again and fainted.

Spears used both hands to catch him. He propped the kid up against the building and slapped his face. He had to do it several times before the kid fluttered his eyes.

"I'm sure a bogey-man," he thought. "I only meant to scare 'im a little and now look!"

A window on the ground floor in back of Spears shot up and a woman's scratchy voice butted in. "Leave the boy alone, you bully! Let him go!"

Spears held onto the boy and half turned to see a red face topped by curl-papers in the window.

"It's my son," Spears said. "He's drunk again and I'm teachin' 'im what he gets for drinkin'."

The woman was mollified. She remembered how it was when her husband—that was the second one, the barber's supply salesman in St. Louis—took to liquor.

"Write me a letter," Spears said and turned his back.

"Such manners!" the woman said and slammed the window.

THEN she opened it again just a little. "Spill it!" Spears told the kid. The kid couldn't get it out fast enough. "I'm Richard Deeker. I just got out, paroled, I mean. I was in Hinkle's office when you were this morning. He's my parole officer. I heard you talkin' through the door—but I didn't listen!"

"I'll bet," said Spears. "Go on."

"Honest I didn't! It just sorta came through. Anyway I used to know Johnny Spears, kind of. In the—you know—stir. And when I heard you was his father and was wonderin' why he jumped his parole and all—why, I wanted to tell you. See? But I was scared to, all the time."

"Scared of what? Who?"

"Oh, gosh! Everything—everybody. Them, you, him, the cops and all. But now—well, if you won't shoot me here's the thing—he jumped it because he had to! Like me. I'm gonna but I don't wanna. See? I gotta go and do what they tell me, robbin' trucks and stuff. I'll get killed or sent back if I don't. An' I'll get the same if I do. What am I gonna do?"

"Names," Spears said fiercely. "Give me names!"

"That Red Ball truckin' company is who. And a guy named Gus, he's big'n fatlike, runs it."

It was either a bad shot or a lucky one.

If the bullet was for Spears, it was a bad shot. If it was for the kid, it was a lucky one. The bullet fanned past Spear's cheek and hit the kid right below the eye. Then it went through his head. And after that it snarled away looking for someone else to kill.

Spears had a corpse on his hands.

The woman in curl-papers went, "Eeeeeee!" like a broken steam whistle. She kept it up and kept it up.

Spears dropped the corpse. He whirled around and pounded toward the archway at the street sidewalk. The shot had come from there, through one of the fancy curlicues a man could look through standing on the walk.

Spears thought, "And me with no gun!"

The sidewalk was empty when Spears got there but the corner ahead looked like someone had just gone around it. Spears went that way.

There were a few people on the street. They were gaping down the street. No running man was in sight. He'd made the next corner. Spears was outdistanced and he had no gun. He stopped and asked the gapers what the man had looked like.

He was a big brute of a man, Spears learned, with a black mustache and a sullen face. The next witness said he was short and fat. A woman insisted that "—he wore an opera hat and a cape and a black mask and he had the fiercest eyes that bored right through me."

Spears gave it up. He thought he probably should go back to the corpse but he decided against it. The woman in curl-papers could do all he could. She'd love to answer questions.

And he also decided against going to the Red Ball Trucking Company's office. He went back to his hotel to get his gun. It was no fancy-Dan gun. It was a Colt .44 revolver. Then he went to the West Coast Transfer Company and cornered the manager.

O'Brien heard him through. He was very nice about it. He liked Spears, believed in him. He even volunteered very private information.

"Yeah, I got a load, all right. Cigarettes and there ain't nobody knows about it but me. But, good Lord, old-timer, the company wouldn't stand for it. I'd like to help you but this—" He flapped his hands to show how helpless it was.

"The load's insured, ain't it?"

"Yes but—"

O'Brien hedged. Jim Spears argued. Spears was a soft-voiced mild-mannered man past middle age but in spite of that, in spite of his white hair and white mustache, he had a confident way about him.

When he said he could do a thing people had to believe it—like the manager,

who said at last, "I'm a triple fool, but I'll take a chance. We'll put it up to the driver." He went to the door and belowered into the garage, "*McGrath!*"

A voice like a hammered oil drum answered and its owner followed. McGrath was an Irishman—a lot of Irishman. Spears thought he was at least a man-and-a-half tall and two wide at the shoulders. He had red hair, blue eyes and a grin.

The grin spread all over his unlovely Irish mug when the manager asked him if he was willing to do as Spears requested.

"Will I?" He lifted one huge fist. "*Boy!*"

"So it's settled," the manager said. "The truck's scheduled to pull out at midnight. Does that suit you?"

"Just right," Spears said.

CHAPTER IV

NIGHT FOR MURDER



SPEARS had something to eat and then he went down to watch the Red Ball garage. He'd been there an hour when a paunchy man came out. He was the one Spears had kicked, the one Richard Deeker had called Gus. Spears followed him.

Gus led Spears down to the waterfront to a moorage where boats of all sorts were rented, serviced and stored. Spears watched from the bank while Gus went down to the float and talked to the uniformed attendant. Gus got a long speedboat and went down the river. Spears ran down the wooden steps.

"Give me a boat that'll keep up with that one!" he said to the attendant.

The attendant was brown-faced and about thirty. He was exasperatingly slow of movement. His face was deadpan—it had no more expression than a cigar store Indian. He looked after the rapidly vanishing speedboat and gave the matter careful consideration.

Finally he turned up his palms, took a deep breath. "Nope," he said.

"You mean there ain't any?"

"Yup."

Spears chewed his mustache in disappointment. As he watched the speedboat went around a bend and out of sight. After a moment, he said, "Does he keep his boat here all the time?"

"Yup."

"You got a boat pretty near as fast?"

"Yup."

Spears took two twenty dollar bills and a ten from his billfold. He made a gesture of it. The attendant kept his brown face rigidly averted. He watched Spears out of the corner of his eyes.

"You can't make your boat go as fast as that one?" Spears said.

"Nope."

"But you could make that boat go as slow as yours?"

"Yup."

"By twelve o'clock tonight?"

"Yup."

"Here," said Spears. "This just fell outa your pocket." He gave the attendant the fifty dollars. The attendant took it. "You're sure a windy sort of a guy, ain't you?" Spears said.

The attendant looked solemnly at Jim Spears. "Nope," he said.

Adolph Hinkle was not to be consoled. He'd lost his bounce and that, with him, amounted to a major casualty. He was a different man.

"I can't help it," he said huskily. "A better man would find a way to help these youngsters. First, your boy, then Benny Stillman—and now Richard Decker. Oh, what am I going to do? What can I do?"

"You can't bodyguard every paroled convict, that's certain." Spears' blue eyes, his sun-darkened face, were filled with concern. He'd been here in Hinkle's office since five o'clock and he couldn't cheer Hinkle, not a particle.

"Hinkle, you got to get over the idea you're to blame. I, for one, say you've done all a mortal man could do and I'll say it to anybody anywhere!"

Hinkle was somewhat cheered by this.

"Sure you have," said Spears. "But what I come to tell you was I got a way to get the guys responsible."

Hinkle did perk up. "Indeed?"

"This afternoon a couple of guys've been drunk in the eatin' places around the truckin' district. They been talking aloud about a load of cigarettes the West Coast Transfer people are shipping out tonight.

"Now a bunch of hi-jackers'd rather get cigarettes than anything. Whoever's robbin' the trucks will sure get word of this load. And they'll try to get it.

"But what they don't know is that I hired those two guys to act drunk and do that talkin'. And I'm goin' to be ridin' in the cab of that truck. The hi-jackers'll stop us and then I'll shoot 'em up and bring 'em in. What d'yah think of that?"

Hinkle looked incredulous. "Alone? You're going to shoot it out with a gang of professional thieves alone?"

"It amounts to that," Spears said.

"Why—the idea's preposterous!" Hinkle shrilled. "That's what it is, preposterous!"

"I dunno why," said Spears mildly. "It's about the only way we're going to find out who's robbin' the trucks and have proof to back it up. If I'm right one of these guys ought to be able to tell about my boy and some of these other killings."

"It's suicide!" Hinkle raved, pounding the desk so hard his glasses jiggled off his button nose. "Under no circumstances will I allow it! Let the police..."

Hinkle battered himself against the stone wall of Spears' quiet stubbornness for a good quarter hour. He pleaded, he threatened, he cajoled. The answer was always the same—Spears was going on the truck, he and the driver alone, at midnight. South on Highway 99E—and the hi-jackers would know about it.

In the end, Hinkle had to throw up his hands. "All right then. It's your life and I suppose after all it's your privilege to throw it away."

"I expect so."

Hinkle stood up. "I wish you luck!" He might have clicked his heels. It was more than good-by.

"That's nice of you," Spears said.

The truck was ready to leave at twelve midnight on the dot. Jim Spears climbed to his place in the high cab. McGrath slid under the wheel. The big Irishman was happy about the whole thing.

"Don't wait up, sweetheart," he belowered at O'Brien. "We may be late!"

O'Brien cursed him furiously and at length—even after the truck had gone.

"O'Brien," O'Brien told himself, "you're crazier than an army of pet coons. A thick-headed Irish gear smasher and a one-time Western sheriff—those two against the hi-jackers!" He looked after the vanishing truck. Suddenly he roared, "By gum, I need a drink!"

Inside the truck cab it was warm and comfortable. Outside it was something else again. It didn't know whether to rain or snow. A blustery wind whipped some of both along the empty streets.

"You gotta admit," McGrath said reasonably, "it comes out right—a nice night for a murder."

THEY passed the city limits and rolled out on the endless black ribbon of 99E. Spears got out his gun, broke it and checked the cylinder. The gun had a nice feel—he hadn't used it in a long time.

"Anywhere's in the next ten miles," McGrath said. "They like it close-in and lonely like this."

"How'll they come?" Spears said.

"Hard to tell. They might block the road ahead or they might come up from behind and shoot out the tires or put a gun on me. I'll see 'em in the rear-view mirror or up ahead in time to give you warning."

"I hope so," Spears said.

But it wasn't like that—they had no warning!

They climbed a long hill in compound low. The motor roared like ten thousand devils and they barely crawled along. After all, a rear-view mirror reflects

only lights at night.

They topped the hill and started down the other side. The truck gathered speed. It was nice not having that bedlam of noise. The highway once more began to flow under them. Spears watched it. It had a lulling effect the way it seemed to twist and turn in the headlight beam. Then suddenly it vanished.

Suddenly Spears couldn't see the highway or the headlights. All he could see was his own reflection in the windshield.

"The dirty—" McGrath swore. He stepped on the brake.

Spears was thrown heavily against the dashboard. He heard a dull thump above his head. And then he knew what had happened.

The hi-jackers had come up behind them without lights, while they were climbing the long hill. One of them had caught the rear of the truck, climbed over the top to the roof of the cab. Then, when they'd gathered speed again he'd dropped a piece of weighted canvas over the windshield.

McGrath had to stop. The big Irishman swore savagely as he cut their speed. To stop at once would throw them in a skid. He pulled an automatic from his waistband and yelled at Spears, "Jump! I'm right behind you."

Spears kicked his door open. McGrath was right. It wouldn't do to be caught in the cab. Things were bad enough. He shoved himself out.

He tried to land on his feet. He did and ran a couple of strides. Then he went to his hands and knees, skidding in the gravel. Then to his face and shoulder. The gravel felt red-hot. He managed to keep his gun and flop into the roadside ditch.

There was water here, knee deep and cold. He crouched down and splashed along toward the truck that had stopped two hundred feet down the road. He couldn't see McGrath and he couldn't see the hi-jackers' car. He wondered about them, then suddenly he knew.

The hi-jackers' car was up abreast of the truck, on the side away from Spears,

on the driver's side. Spears still couldn't see it but he didn't need to. What a dirty sound that machinegun made!

It chattered out a stream of metallic explosive gibberish—and McGrath roared with the pain of it.

The stubborn Irishman had failed to jump. He'd stayed in the truck to hold it on the road, to get himself a hatful of lead, to die from it behind the wheel of the truck he loved so much.

No! He wasn't dead. Spears saw the near door open and McGrath's dark shape drop to the ground. Spears roared some crazy thing. He stopped and planted his feet and shot the man off the top of the cab.

He liked the feel of his gun kicking. It was satisfying, the way the corpse pitched off the cab roof and cracked face-first into the gravel.

McGrath rolled under the body of the truck. There were about six feet of space between the two machines.

Two of the hi-jackers got out of their car and into the space.

Gus and another one—"Hello, Gus, you had to come after me, didn't you? I thought you would."

Gus had a machine-gun. He would have liked to use it on Spears. But he never did.

McGrath had rolled under the truck and now he was lying on his back almost at Gus' feet. Gus didn't see him. It didn't matter that McGrath was almost cut in two by machinegun bullets, that he would never get up again. There was still blood enough left in him and strength to raise his gun—still life enough to pull the trigger.

He couldn't miss. He had the gun tucked right under that sagging belly. The bullet must have made a mess inside.

McGrath was happy.

"There now, Gus . . . How does it feel? . . . Sure, drop the gun and grab your belly . . . Grab the bullet hole . . . Tip your head back, Gus . . . Try to scream . . . Taste the blood . . . Don't it hurt like hell?"

That was between Gus and an Irishman, McGrath. Spears had hoped for Gus himself. But McGrath had more reason. Spears took the man with Gus instead.

He shot him in the temple.

There were four hi-jackers in all—the one on the truck cab, these two and the stringbean.

The stringbean poked his sharp dark face above the radiator of the car he'd driven. He took a shot at Spears. The bullet whacked the truck and whined away.

Spears stepped out and had his try. The stringbean's gun was high with recoil, coming down. Spears' bullet hit the gun instead of the stringbean's eye. It shattered the gun and left the hand a bloody stump.

The stringbean looked at it and began to cry.

Spears tried to figure it out. He couldn't think very well. So much had happened. There was Gus, shot in the stomach, that blond fellow, shot in the temple, and McGrath—all dead.

Then this stringbean crying! It was his own damned fault! Spears went into the shadow by the ditch and got horribly sick.

CHAPTER V

FLOWERS TO MARTHA



GETTING over the butcher's holiday was like getting over a three-week drunk. Spears was cloudy about it a long time afterward.

He remembered vague things like washing his face in the muddy water of the ditch. And the way he'd tucked the bodies under the truck out of the rain—as if they gave a darn. He handcuffed the stringbean to the truck bumper and took the sedan and went back to town.

He had to call O'Brien, and that was a hard job. "Everything came out," he

told him. "They showed up, all right. And we had a fight with 'em and we won, all right. But the hell of it is," he said, "the hell of it is—McGrath is dead!"

"Oh—" the manager whispered.

Spears went to Martha Hurst's apartment. She opened the door. Her hand flew to her mouth to stifle a half scream and her eyes went wide. She stepped back, staring, as Spears pushed in.

"I'm all right," Spears told her quickly. "Just scratched and muddy. That's all, not hurt. I'm perfectly all right, I tell you!"

The girl wouldn't believe it. Her eyes said she didn't believe it but Spears kept talking evenly and without strain and finally the girl calmed down.

"I want you to call this telephone number and pretend you're long distance," Spears said. "Say it's Williamville calling."

The girl dialed the number.

"Hello, is this Tabor three two four one? Hold the line, please. Williamville calling."

Spears took the instrument. "This is Gus. Yeah, Gus. Listen. We stopped the truck but they was too much for us . . . Shut up and listen. The old guy put matches to my feet and made me tell about the kid. . . That's what I said! He's on his way now. You better move the kid before he gets there. Use my boat."

Spears hung up. "You don't know Gus," he said to Martha, "but that sounded more like Gus than Gus."

"Now what?"

"We go get Johnny."

The plan worked very well as far as it went. Spears and the girl went down to the moorage and the brown-faced attendant was still there and waiting. He'd earned his fifty dollars.

Spears piloted the boat down around the river bend and waited in the darkness, motor idling. It wasn't long till Gus' boat came roaring by, chasing the long white finger of its headlight down the river. Spears followed it easily enough. It took them to a houseboat

moored in the mouth of a small creek.

Spears left his boat against the bank a hundred yards upstream. "Come down when I yell," he told Martha, "and not a bit sooner."

He went the rest of the way on foot.

There was a plank from the shore to the houseboat. Spears paused at the shore end of it. This was as far as his plan went—he wasn't sure what to do next.

The houseboat was dark except for one window in the back of the building. Dirty lantern light spilled from there and it was darkened momentarily by a moving shadow. Johnny would be in that room.

But to get to him Spears would have to go through the door in the front of the houseboat, through a darkened room and probably another door. It was a tough nut to crack. And Spears, unutterably tired and burnt out, was in no mood for subtleties.

He drew his gun and slammed right in.

The front door was partly open. Spears' shoulder hit it, cracked it wide. The other door was closed and edged with pencils of yellow light. Spears made for it. A chair barked his shin. He trampled it down. Then he had the doorknob. He ripped the door open and he was in.

He planted himself, gun held in front of him. "Hinkle!" he said. "Put 'em up."

Adolph Hinkle was in a half-turned position over a figure on an iron cot. He straightened slowly, face white, eyes alive with a crazy glitter.

The figure on the cot was Johnny, all right—long lean Johnny with the curly black hair and Spears' own amazingly blue eyes. He was tied and gagged. He looked at Spears and his eyes were frantic and he jerked his head—a warning but Spears didn't get it.

He knew there had to be someone to guard Johnny when Hinkle wasn't around. But he didn't remember it until it was too late—until he felt the cold kiss of a gun muzzle on the back of his neck. And then he was too sick even to

swear about it.

He dropped his gun as he was told to do. Hinkle lowered his hands.

"That's better, much much better!" He was a happy beaming little satan with a devil's joy of evil and a devil's capacity for it. "Come right in, please. Ah, yes, stand right over there. Watch him carefully, Charlie—very carefully!"

Charlie was an ex-prizefighter. Tin ears and lithe movements were proof of that. And he bent round little eyes, heavy brows and thick lips in a professional scowl for Spears' benefit.

"One of your paroled convicts, I expect," Spears said.

Hinkle nodded happily. "Quite so. Good men for the most part. They'll do anything to stay out of jail. Stillman though and Richard Deeker were too weak to be dependable. Had to be eliminated before you learned too much from them. And your boy here—too strong! He defies me. But now, with your help, we can persuade him."

HE TURNED to remove the gag from Johnny's mouth. "Gus told me you bested them. Quite a fighter, aren't you?"

"We bested them, sure enough," Spears said. "Only it was me who called you. Gus is dead. I wanted you to lead me here like you did. I followed you in a boat."

Hinkle gasped his amazement. "Well, you *are* clever! But how did you know about me?"

Time was what Spears wanted and he was willing to talk to gain it. Just what he would do with it he didn't know. Perhaps Charlie would relax a second or turn his eyes away. All Spears wanted was a decent chance.

"That agate you said Johnny gave you, that was your slip. I gave that to Johnny—it was his mother's. He wouldn't part with it for no money. So you had to take it. Being so crazy about agates you couldn't resist getting this one for your collection.

"That meant you had him jammed up

some way so he couldn't help himself. I thought you'd know where he was and why he took that load of furs. And sure 'nough, you did—and here we are."

"But if you knew this about me," Hinkle asked, "why did you tell me about the cigarettes?"

"Just to be sure you were the guy and to get them hi-jackers. I was kidding you when I said I hired those two guys to act drunk and blab around about the load of cigarettes. You were the only guy I told!"

"Oh, splendid!" Hinkle said. "A perfect ruse!"

"I like it," Spears said. "I knew you'd tell that Red Ball outfit—if you were workin' with 'em like I thought you were. And I knew Gus would jump at a chance to get back at me for kickin' him in the belly."

"And that's exactly what happened!" Hinkle seemed to enjoy the whole thing.

He turned, briskly businesslike, and removed Johnny's gag in a few seconds.

"Your boy, here," Hinkle said to Spears, "is going to tell me what he did with the truckload of furs. You see, he was supposed to take the truck to a rendezvous with Gus. But instead of that he took the truck somewhere else."

Hinkle finished removing the gag and stepped back. "Fortunately for us, however, we were able to apprehend him in front of the apartment of Martha Hurst.

"Now, Johnny," he said, "why don't you save us a lot of unnecessary bother and tell me about that truck?"

Johnny ignored Hinkle and grinned as best he could at his father. "A nice mess I got us into, Dad. Sorry."

"We wouldn't be in it if I'd used my head when I come here," Spears said.

"Let's don't waste time." Hinkle was sharp and cold. "Tell me, boy."

Johnny's eyes sought his father's and Jim Spears shook his head. "Go to hell!" Johnny said.

"Charlie," Hinkle said to the gunman, "we'll have to use persuasion. I'll ask Johnny once more. If he says no—shoot

his father in the right shoulder. Take your aim now."

Charlie took a better stance, lifted the gun at arm's length, sighted it on Spears' shoulder.

"Well, boy?" Hinkle said.

Johnny was white-faced. He looked at Spears' face and got his answer.

"No," he said, almost reluctantly.

Charlie fired. The bullet hit Spears, all right. It knocked him half around and he staggered back two steps to the wall. He managed to keep erect. He put his left hand to his right shoulder and his face twisted up in a grimace of pain. The grimace was mostly faked and the hand was to conceal the fact that the shot had almost missed.

The bullet had ripped Spears' coat and burned the skin on top of his shoulder. But he wasn't badly hurt. He could use his right arm, limp as it seemed.

"Now the left shoulder," Hinkle said.

"Damn you!" Johnny said.

"Just so. After this his legs. I imagine he'll live for hours. Shall we go on?"

It was a bad moment. Jim Spears had a wintry look in his eyes that meant he was through with Johnny if Johnny weakened. And this smiling devil with the sweet benevolent look would certainly go on with it. Johnny was in a spot.

And so was Jim Spears. Charlie was going to do better this time. No doubt of it, he had a lower sight. That would mean fins for Spears. The gun was aimed now so there seemed no way out. He was braced, though, beneath his appearance of painful weakness, and ready—which was a good thing.

For at that moment Martha Hurst, who had heard the first shot and had waited breathlessly for Jim Spears to call her, fainted—against the horn button.

It made a horrible sound, that horn. It blasted the silence into a thousand fragments. And it gave Jim Spears the chance he needed.

He had been waiting desperately for a break and he recovered first from the start the horn gave him. He went for

Charlie and that gun. Charlie, startled witless by the horn, looked at Hinkle, who was also open-mouthed.

They both thought Spears was badly hurt anyway. So Spears was able to make a go of it.

He was able to get that gun hand, get his thumbs on the back of it and his fingers tight around the gun butt, to twist it sharply outward.

CHARLIE yelled with the pain of it but Spears didn't care. He jerked the hand and wrist in that strained position and broke the arm like a rotten stick. The gun was free in Spears' hand. He whipped it against Charlie's temple. Charlie went to a place where his arm wouldn't hurt him.

The Spears family, father and son, were a perfect team. Adolph Hinkle drew his own gun to shoot Jim Spears. He might have succeeded but Johnny pulled his bound legs up and kicked Hinkle in the small of the back.

Hinkle's head snapped, his gun blasted plaster off the ceiling. Jim Spears stepped over Charlie's still form and rammed his gun barrel into Hinkle's round little stomach. Hinkle's eyes popped and his mouth opened wide. He didn't drop his gun—that wasn't fast enough.

He threw it down.

"Don't kill me!" Hinkle shrilled. "I'm unarmed!"

"I won't," said Spears. "I'll let the State do that."

* * * * *

"For Martha—who faints beautifully!"

That was a card on a bouquet of flowers. The flowers were in a bowl in the center of the table in Martha's apartment. They were withered. They'd been there several days. Jim Spears, looking mild and middle-aged again, was sitting across the table from Martha and Johnny.

"Hinkle," he said, "decided to plead guilty when the cops proved his gun

shot Deeker and found a guy who saw him running away the day Deeker was killed."

Johnny looked at his father. There was an amused light in his eyes but real admiration lingered there too. "You know," he said to Martha, "you wouldn't think it to look at him that he was such a holy terror but let—"

"Son!" said Spears. "In about a minute she's going to get a demonstration 'less'n you shut that mouth of yours and keep it shut!"

Johnny grinned. "That's my pappy!"

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(Continued from page 91)

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"So we come to Thursday night. You went upstairs and picked up some of your wife's jewelry, some silverplate, your wallet. You threw them out the window onto the lawn. Then you went downstairs and out into the darkness. You pulled down one of the tree branches and wedged it into the window. You came back into the house and went over to your wife who was sitting on the sofa. She was probably wondering what it was all about. She never had a chance to find out. Wrapped in a canvas bag was your hand, and in that was the gun.

"You put the gun against her head and killed her. That was all right. But

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the police would get suspicious if the gun was fired close to you, too. So over to the window you ran, where you had those two nails rigged up. You set the gun in quickly, tied a string around the trigger, and stood back ten yards in front of it. Closing your eyes you yanked the string. The bullet hit you. But not in the shoulder where you had planned. You'd miscalculated a little and you got it lower down. As bad as you were hit you managed to crawl over and unhook the gun. You brought out the bag and put the gun in.

"Then the bag was tied to the tree branch with the string. You opened the window. The branch sprung up again among the leaves and out of sight. Later when you got home you'd get rid of it. But now you were bleeding worse than you had expected to. You started to crawl for the phone but you passed out before you made it." I turned to Cannavo. "Did I leave anything out, Tony?"

"No," Cannavo said.

"I want my attorney," said Hayden.

"We'll have a man at your bed twen-

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ty-four hours a day," Cannavo said, "until you're out of here. In fact, the first one is waiting outside now."

"I want to make a call," Hayden said.

"Maybe you'd like to sign a statement?" Cannavo asked hopefully.

"No. I want my attorney."

"Give him the phone," I said. "Call your man in, Tony, and let's get going. I'm an hour late for supper as it is."

"Run along, Max," Cannavo said. "I'll get a ride."

"You mean you're staying?"

"Well," he coughed apologetically.

"That nurse, you know. The pretty one. She's off duty in half an hour."

"Don't apologize," I said. "I wasn't always this old."

I went out of the room and down the corridor to the public telephone booth. I went in, closed the door, dropped a nickel down in, and dialed. I waited a moment.

"Ellie?" I said. "Yes. . . Yes, I'll be home for supper. . . Twenty minutes. . . Yes, I know. I know it's cold."

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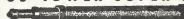
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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 8)

chauffeur on an estate, just to have something to do during his summer vacation. He wasn't long in discovering weird things happening about him. There was the mysterious locked room in the basement of the big house, the girl who had gone insane, and the warnings that all was not right.

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LETTERS FROM READERS

LET'S look now at what you readers have to say about **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. Here are a few of the letters that have come our way recently.

MURDER BY TELEVISION, by Stewart Sterling, is the kind of story I like—right up to the minute and something really new and different. This fellow Sterling certainly writes as if he knows what he's talking about. Let's have more by him. More! More!—*J. Francoey MacDermott, Alpine, N. J.*

Besides having a long list of motion pictures to his credit, Stewart Sterling has written plenty for television. He

does know—right from the inside—what he's talking about.

The girl (wow!) on your recent cover is plenty okay, but can't we have covers with a little more action and fight? Now if there'd have been a killer creeping up on the girl from behind with a knife that already dripped blood—that would have been something.—*Malley Duff, Jr., Portland, Ore.*

We'll see what we can do, Malley.

Just a few lines from a POPULAR DETECTIVE reader. I think that your stories are swell, and if I were to alter them in any way, I think I would not let the reader know who the murderer is too soon in the story. As for the people who have any criticism of your stories, tell them to try their hand at writing a story or two, and see how well they can satisfy the public. I have written a few short stories and the authors have my sympathy, for it is a very grueling job. And as for the things the readers gripe about, saying they could not be true—they must remember that POPULAR DETECTIVE does not pretend to publish true stories. Magazines that publish true stories are a different sort altogether.—*James W. Meeks, R. No. 1, Mayflower, Ark.*

Thanks for coming to our defense, Jim, and for telling us how much you like POPULAR DETECTIVE. But as you readers may know, we like to hear complaints as well as compliments. It's only through your frank and honest criticism that we can continue to improve POPULAR DETECTIVE and keep it on top as the outstanding detective and mystery story magazine in the world today.

We read your magazine a lot. THE TAILOR MADE SHROUD was very good. Hope you have many more like it. I think Mike Shayne should come back again.—*Mrs. W. L. Headings, Wellsville, Ark.*

Thanks, Mrs. W. L. We hope we can arrange to have him back soon.

That winds up our OFFICIAL BUSINESS for this time. But we promise to return next issue with more previews of coming stories and many more letters from you readers. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. Thanks—and let us know how you like the stories!

—THE EDITOR.

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